THE BLUE AURA

HUGH WALTERS

The Blue Aura

by the same author

EXPEDITION VENUS
DESTINATION MARS
THE CAVES OF DRACH
THE LAST DISASTER

The Blue Aura

HUGH WALTERS

FABER AND FABER
LONDON · BOSTON

First published in 1979
by Faber and Faber Limited
3 Queen Square London WC1
Printed in Great Britain by
The Bowering Press Ltd
Plymouth and London
All rights reserved
© Hugh Walters, 1979

British Library Cataloguing
in Publication Data

Walters, Hugh
I. Title
The blue aura
823'.9'1J PZ7.W1715

ISBN 0-571-11423-7

One

The small yellow plane touched down quite smoothly on the runway at Guernsey Airport. Aurigny Airlines prided itself on the efficiency and experience of its pilots, and Captain Bott was one of their best.

Twelve people had made the ten-minute flight from Jersey, and now they were streaming along the tarmac to the terminal building. Their luggage arrived almost alongside them, and within a few minutes Chris Godfrey and his three friends were claiming their belongings.

There were few people in that building who recognised the four young men. Chris, their leader, was a famous astronaut, though he had now been taken off actual space travel to become Deputy to Sir William Gillanders, the Director of the United Nations Exploration Agency.

The other three were still on U.N.E.X.A's active list. Morrey Kant was the tall, crew-cut American. Serge Smyslov, the Russian, was dark and slight, while Tony Hale, the youngest of the four, looked a typical British youth.

These four had been together on many fantastic flights, and there was no corner of the solar system which they had not visited some many times. To them Lunar City, Man's first settlement beyond Earth, was a familiar place, and they had bounded across the Moon's rocky surface more times than they could remember.

Chris, whilst appreciating his promotion, keenly regretted no longer being able to accompany his three friends on their space trips. But U.N.E.X.A. had been adamant. It insisted that the Deputy to Sir Billy should be someone with practical experience of conditions in the solar system. So Chris had to be content with spending time with the others whenever their spells of leave happened to coincide.

"How did you manage it this time?" Tony had asked with a grin as they boarded the plane at London Airport. They all knew that Chris sometimes used his influence to arrange their periods of holiday so that they "happened" to fall together.

"You haven't any complaints, have you?" Chris countered. He didn't want to tell them yet the real reason why it had been arranged for them to join him, or to admit that their so-called holiday together was really a top-secret mission requested by Sir Billy Gillanders himself.

"Be very discreet about the whole thing," the Director had requested. "We don't want people to get alarmed."

"Where are we staying?" asked Tony as they waited for their hired car to be brought to them.

"At a small hotel called 'Le Saumarez' at Grandes Rocques, about four or five miles away," Chris explained. "I've never been to it myself, but it's been highly recommended. I didn't think you'd want to stay in St. Peter Port."

"Suits me," smiled Tony. "I expect we'll be able to get into the capital city whenever we want."

"Of course," Chris agreed. "That's why we have this car. And there's a very good bus service, I'm told, if any of you want to go into St. Peter Port on your own."

Further conversation was cut short by the arrival of their hired car, a dark-blue Renault. Chris signed the chit and they loaded their bags into the back.

"Who's going to drive?" asked Serge.

"Morrey," said Chris. "He says he can drive anything that runs on wheels."

"Maybe," laughed Tony, "but you should see how wobbly he is on a bicycle."

Morrey gave his young friend a playful cuff, and then settled himself in the driver's seat. Soon they were speeding along the Guernsey roads, past the innumerable glasshouses, and off towards the north-west coast where their hotel was situated.

"Gosh! I've never seen so many glasshouses," Tony exclaimed when they had been travelling for a few minutes. "What do they grow?"

"The main crop is tomatoes," Chris told him. "It's said that ten per cent of the Island is covered with glass."

He had a map on his knee and gave directions to Morrey.

"Let's drive round the place for a bit," Chris suggested, and the others agreed.

"It's not a big place," Chris told them. "It's about ten miles by four. You could drive all around it in about an hour. I've stayed here a couple of times before and I like it."

From the Airport they drove due west and reached the sea at Portelet Bay. The setting sun glinted on the sea and threw shadows of the tumbled heaps of rock across the sands. They followed the coastal road north, skirting Rocquaine Bay and noticing Lihou Island just off the coast. Then they turned north-east past stretches of glorious sand round Vazon Bay.

It was a beautiful island, marred only by the occasional fort or gun emplacement—relics of the German Occupation during the Second World War. Most of them had been left as a constant reminder of those dark days, and had now become a tourist attraction.

"We turn right by that big hotel," Chris told Morrey, pointing to a large, grey, turreted building.

"Looks like a castle to me," observed Tony.

They turned where Chris had indicated and drove slowly for half a mile.

"Is that it?" asked Serge, pointing to a hotel on their left.

"That's it," Chris confirmed. "Hotel Le Saumarez. Looks all right, doesn't it?"

The hotel looked very similar to hundreds of others on the Island. It was clean, fresh-looking and inviting. There was an area at the side where cars could be parked. From its size Chris guessed that there would be about twenty-five bedrooms. Tony hoped that the food would be good, for that was the most important part of any holiday to that ever-hungry young man.

They pulled into the car park and spilled out of the car.

"Get our bags out while I go to Reception and see about our booking," Chris said, and while the other three unloaded the bags he made his way into the hotel.

Peter and Carla Hamperl were the proprietors of Le Saumarez, and they were personally engaged in running the hotel. Peter was a big, jolly man. His wife was dark and attractive, with a delicious Austrian accent. They made a practice of getting on Christian name terms with all their guests within a couple of days of their arrival.

"Yes, everything is ready," Peter told Chris, "and we've been told to give special attention to Mr. Godfrey and his party."

"Er—don't do that," Chris said hastily. "No one is to know that our stay here is not an ordinary vacation, or that it was arranged by U.N.E.X.A. Not even my friends know yet, Mr. Hamperl."

"Call me Peter," the big man said. "Very well, but you can count on Carla and me for anything you want. Have you any idea how long you will be staying, Mr. Godfrey?"

"You'd better call me Chris," the Deputy Director smiled. "No, I don't know how long we shall be staying. But keep that confidential, too. My friends think we are only here for a fortnight."

As they were speaking the other three came in with their bags, the hefty Morrey carrying Chris's as well. Chris introduced them all to Peter, who showed them to their rooms.

"Dinner in half an hour suit you?" the proprietor asked as the quartet began to unpack.

"Fine. What's on the menu?" the irrepressible Tony asked.

"You just wait and see," Morrey told him severely. "Must your mind always be on food?"

"It could be on worse things," Tony replied cheekily.

Chris was ready first. They had agreed to meet in the lounge for a glass of sherry before going into the dining-room. Already there were a score of guests with the same idea in mind, and they all greeted Chris with a friendly smile.

Peter was officiating behind the bar, but Chris decided to wait for the others before ordering. He sat on a stool and chatted to the proprietor.

"Are you busy?" he asked.

"We're almost full," Peter told him. "We've had a good season with bookings for several weeks yet."

Then Peter dropped his voice so that no one else could hear him.

"Miss Howard is due tomorrow," he told Chris quietly. Chris nodded, and just then Tony led in the other two.

The meal was a fabulous one, satisfying even young Mr. Hale. The waitresses were friendly and efficient. Carla flitted about from table to table, making sure that all was well and that the meal was to everyone's liking.

"Would you like coffee in the lounge?" she asked the astronauts.

They folded up their napkins and went into the lounge, where they settled into deep, comfortable chairs. Other guests smiled and nodded to them.

"This is about the friendliest hotel I've ever stayed in," Morrey declared as they waited for their tray of coffee. "Courtesy doesn't cost much, and I should imagine it pays dividends."

"Shall we have a walk up to the shore afterwards?" Chris suggested, and the others agreed. So at half-past eight, as the sun was sinking into the sea, they set off on the thousand-metre walk to the beach.

"Gosh, I can do with a walk after that meal," Tony breathed contentedly as they strolled along. "By the way, who suggested we should come to Guernsey for a holiday, and who chose our hotel?"

"Aren't you satisfied? You be content and enjoy it," Chris smiled evasively.

"I take it that that is an old German fortification?" Morrey observed some moments later. They had reached the foreshore to see massive concrete structures on a jutting rocky headland. They were now mellowed by age, but their strength was still impressive.

"Yes, and there are many such gun emplacements all round the island," Chris replied. "And yet they were never used to defend it. The Germans pulled out without a fight when their armies in France began to crumble."

The four clambered across the fortifications and were impressed by their strength.

"It must have taken much labour to construct," Serge said.

"Yes, and most of it was slave labour imported from captured countries," Chris told them. "Conditions during the building must have been very bad."

By the time they had completed their exploration it was nearly dark. Navigation lights were glinting on the placid sea. A distant ship went steadily on its silent way. By common consent they sat on the grass to watch its passage. Most of the holidaymakers had gone back to their hotels. Only a solitary couple still lingered on the shore.

"Now, you three," Chris said after a moment, "I've something to tell you. It wasn't I who fixed up this spell of leave together. It was the Chief himself."

The others stopped casting pebbles or chewing grass-stalks.

"That was generous of him," exclaimed Morrey. "Where's the catch?"

It seemed a long time before Chris spoke.

"This is no holiday," he told them. "Actually we are on a mission. U.N.E.X.A. has arranged all this and given us a task to do."

"Tell us more," said Serge quietly.

Again Chris hesitated; then he plunged into his story.

"During the last six months," he began, "there has been an extraordinary number of U.F.O. sightings over the Island. Oh, I know that U.N.E.X.A. is flooded with them all the time, but these seem different. So much so, that we have been sent here to investigate them."

"Different? How?" asked Morrey. "Surely Sir Billy doesn't take them seriously?"

"The Chief says he has an open mind on the subject," answered Chris, "and I suppose that wouldn't be a bad attitude for us. These Guernsey sightings have been made by so many reliable people that it's impossible to ignore them."

"There hasn't been anything on T.V. or in the press," Tony pointed out.

"No. U.N.E.X.A. decided to suppress all news about them till we have reported back. If it became generally known it would cause concern among the people."

"You'd get tourists flocking here in their thousands," Tony grinned.

"Or those that are here being scared away," Serge suggested.

"But why are you only telling us about it now?" asked Morrey.

"Sir Billy doesn't want a whisper of our mission to get around. He thought it best that I should brief you after we got to the Island. You see, we have to give the appearance of being ordinary holidaymakers. If we'd arrived with a serious purpose in our minds, we'd have found that difficult. Now that we're here, we are to start our investigations as soon as possible."

"So it was Sir Billy who fixed up our hotel? Is U.N.E.X.A. paying the bill as well?" asked Tony. "If so, I'm not grumbling."

"And how long are we supposed to stay here?" Morrey wanted to know.

"Yes, U.N.E.X.A. is responsible for our accommodation," Chris confirmed. "But as for how long we are booked for—I don't know. For as long as it takes us to submit a report, I suspect."

"Oh well, we needn't hurry," Tony sighed. "The food at our Hotel is good and the people are all friendly. I'm going to enjoy this mission to the full."

"I'm afraid we do have to hurry," Chris said seriously. "In fact, we have to start work in the morning. Our first task is to interview a young lady—one who has had a very strange experience. But we'll find out more about that tomorrow."

Two

Susan Howard—Sue to her friends—was a tall slim girl with blond hair, and she was just twenty years old. She had a longish straight nose and a fairly wide mouth. When she smiled, which was often, her white teeth would have made a good advertisement for some well-known brand of tooth-paste. She was attractive, intelligent, and well-educated. She worked as secretary to a famous Midlands surgeon, and she liked her job tremendously.

Some six months before, her father had died suddenly. They had been very close indeed, often going about together, for Mrs. Howard was in poor health and unable to accompany her husband to the professional dinners and conferences that he was required to attend. Sue had had to stand in for her, which threw her into her father's company more than most girls of her age. So his death affected her very deeply, and it was to help her to recover from this that her mother and elder brother had insisted on her taking a holiday. By chance she had chosen Guernsey, which was a place she had heard a lot about but had never visited. Her Aunt Jenny was to go along with her.

Sue and Aunt Jenny had spent the first four days visiting the different bays with which Guernsey abounds. They had gone for long walks and had crossed over to the island of Herm. Then the older lady developed a bad cold and decided to stay indoors.

"You go off on your own, my dear," she told Sue. "I'll be all right."

Sue agreed. But what should she do? Where should she go?

"Visit the German Underground Hospital and Ammunition Store," said a card behind the reception desk of the hotel. Well, why not? It could be interesting. And it was easy to get to by bus.

"I'm going to the German Hospital," she told her aunt after she had seen her safely installed in an armchair with several morning papers and a supply of magazines.

"Bye-bye, dear," said Aunt Jenny, who was already immersed in the astrology column of a well-known daily. "Don't get talking to those doctors."

Sue laughed to herself. The Hospital hadn't been used for well over half a century, but Aunt Jenny wouldn't know that. And even if she did she would declare that some young doctor might still be lurking in its depths.

There was a bus stop right outside the hotel, and Sue enquired the number of the most convenient one. She must go into St. Peter Port and then catch the Number 7 bus which would drop her a quarter of a mile from the Hospital.

It was a fine, warm day, and she enjoyed the walk from the bus. She felt better than at any time since her father had died. A sign indicated the way to the Hospital. Strange, she thought, that the Germans should go to the immense trouble of constructing such a place deep underground. Probably it was to protect it from possible air raids. But to site it next to an ammunition store! Yet she had read of Red Crosses being painted on ammunition trains so as to deceive the enemy, who might be disinclined to attack something so humanitarian.

The entrance to the Hospital was in a hillside. Electric lights illuminated the entrance and pay desk, where a bored-looking lady awaited the occasional visitor.

"Keep your ticket. You must hand it back when you come out," she told Sue. "We have to check everyone out."

Strange, the girl thought, do they expect to lose someone inside?

But as soon as she had passed the entrance hall and its exhibits of the Occupation, she began to understand this precaution. For some reason which she couldn't explain, she suddenly began to feel cold.

Normally Sue, a healthy intelligent girl, would have laughed at the idea of anything being "spooky". Now, for the first time in her life, she felt a strange chill of fear which grew as she walked through the gloomy, echoing tunnels.

There didn't seem to be any other visitors. She had the whole vast underground complex to herself. At first she tried to fight off the weird feeling that had come over her by taking a lively interest in this huge underground construction. At intervals there were plans of the Hospital on the walls, each having an arrow indicating that precise point. Sue noticed that several unfinished tunnels were shown—probably abandoned when the German Army pulled out.

The drip of water and her own footsteps were the only sounds that went echoing round the seemingly endless corridors. According to the wall-plans there was a series of tunnels off to the right and left. Those on the left were the hospital wards, and those on the right were storerooms, cinema, toilets and kitchens. In some of the wards there were still the original hospital beds in which men had suffered and died. The girl's lively imagination made her shudder when she thought of some of the ghastly scenes they had witnessed.

Every moment Sue's feeling of cold fear increased. She could sense the agony of countless young soldiers who had died in these gloomy depths, far from home and family. She began to hurry her steps, anxious to get out of this awful place.

Then she stopped, shocked to a standstill. A notice on one long, forbidding tunnel bore the word "Mortuary". Sue wanted to scream and run away, but no sound came from her throat, and her feet seemed frozen to the ground. The dim light from two small electric bulbs seemed different from the lights in the other tunnels. Here there was a bluish tinge to the light—and it didn't seem to be coming from the bulbs. Where it came from, she couldn't tell. All she knew was that it was an unnatural, uneasy light.

She struggled hard to get away. Staggering, she stumbled along the dark passages without knowing or caring which way she went. Then she stopped in sheer panic. She was lost!

Sue heard scream after scream echoing down the tunnels, and it was a few moments before she realised that she was listening to her own voice. Sobbing, she sank on to the damp floor, making a supreme effort to pull herself together.

Of course she couldn't be lost, she tried to tell herself. If she walked about enough she would come to the entrance again. And even if she didn't, they would eventually come looking for her if what the woman at the pay desk had said was right. She struggled to her feet and ran along the darkened corridors until she came to a "T" junction. Should she turn right or left? Why wasn't there a wall-plan where it was most needed? She turned to the right.

Sue had run only fifty yards or so in this new direction when she pulled up sharply. Leading off to her left was one of the unfinished tunnels she had earlier noted on the plan. Except that, unlike the others she had seen, there seemed to be a light at the end of this one.

Or rather a glow. And it wasn't really at the end. It seemed to begin a little distance from where she was standing and to get slightly brighter the farther away it was. It was still too dim for her to see the other end of the tunnel clearly. Slightly blue, the light reminded her of the strange and ghostly glow she had seen in the Hospital mortuary.

As she stood irresolutely, Sue's fears began to subside a little, and curiosity started to take their place. Why wasn't this tunnel lit by electricity as all the others were? Yet if it was, indeed, unfinished, why should it be illuminated at all? What was the source of light? Hesitantly she took a few steps along this mysterious excavation.

Then something inexplicable happened. Quite suddenly the girl's panic had vanished, her fears had gone away. She felt an overwhelming curiosity and an urge to press on down the unfinished tunnnel to find out where the glow was coming from.

Her pace quickened. Gone now was the panicky flight of a few moments before. Now she pressed steadily on, wondering what she would find. The blue glow was more pronounced; it seemed to be coming from all around her, and cast no shadows. She'd never seen anything like it before, except that fainter one in the mortuary.

Then a peculiar thing struck Sue. She noticed the walls of the tunnel. Instead of being rough-hewn as they had been at the entrance, they were now smooth and glistening. They were not lined with concrete as had been the walls of all the other tunnels she had passed through. She stopped and put a hesitant finger on the wall. It was cold and slippery as ice. She had never seen anything like it before. She resumed her walk into the glow.

Sue no longer felt the slightest fear. On the contrary, the blue glow made her feel quite happy, even excited. It was wonderful to be bathed in this lovely aura. Her step lightened, and she felt an urge to sing. Then she came to an angle in the tunnel. What she saw around that bend was so amazing that she felt her senses reeling.

There were people there—at least they looked like people. They had human form; they were tall, with fair skin and long hair. They seemed to be clothed in long, loose robes that shone. Each emitted that blue aura with which Sue had now become familiar. There were about twenty of them and they seemed to be talking together. She watched their calm and beautiful faces with complete fascination. Then, with one accord, they turned and saw her. The excitement and shock were too much for the girl and she fell to the ground in a faint.

It was nearly mid-day when the taxi pulled up at Le Saumarez. Chris and the other three had been waiting as patiently as possible for Miss Howard to arrive from the airport. Tony had suggested that they went for a long walk, but Chris wanted to be on hand when the young lady appeared.

"Miss Howard?" he asked politely as the girl went to register.

"Yes, and you must be Mr. Godfrey," she smiled. "And are these your friends?"

Chris introduced Tony, Serge and Morrey, and there was keen competition to carry her bags to her room—Morrey and Tony sharing the honours.

"I've asked Peter—he's the proprietor—to put you at our table," Chris explained. "I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I?" laughed Sue. "It isn't every girl who can share a table with four such famous young men."

"Flatterer," grinned Chris. "See you at lunch, then."

"Gosh! She's all right," breathed Tony as they sat in the lounge a few moments later. "Have you met her before, Chris?"

"No. I've merely read an account of the strange experience she had on the Island a few months ago. It was Sir Billy who thought that we could best start our task by listening to what Miss Howard has to tell us."

"While we're waiting, will you not tell us of events so far?" suggested Serge.

"Very well," Chris agreed. "As you know, sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects have been reported for many years. Some people believe that there are even biblical references to them. Most can be explained by such things as meteorological balloons, ice crystals in the upper atmosphere, the planet Venus, and, of course, plain hoaxes. But that still leaves a considerable number that appear to be genuine.

"Some people have declared that they have seen some of these so-called flying saucers land, and strange beings come out of them. However, this has never been confirmed, and certainly we have no record of contact being made with anyone from another world."

"Then why have the sightings over this Island been treated more seriously than others?" asked Serge.

"First of all because there have been an exceptional number, and they have been concentrated over one small area of Guernsey. Then there were Miss Howard's experiences."

"What were they?" Tony asked.

"Better ask her yourself," Chris smiled. "Here she is."

The four young men stood up politely as Sue joined them. She had changed into a pink linen suit and looked delightfully cool.

"Er—what will you have to drink?" asked Morrey and Tony almost simultaneously.

"Bitter lemon, please," smiled Sue. "Heavens! I'm hungry. What's the food like here?"

"Better ask Tony," Morrey laughed. "He's our expert."

"It's great," the young astronaut enthused, "and you'll be putting on weight if you're here very long."

"Heaven forbid!" Sue exclaimed in horror. "I'm much too fat already."

"Rubbish. You're just right," the American assured her.

"Now, may we hear your story, Miss Howard?" Chris asked.

"Oh, please call me Sue," the girl exclaimed. "You make me feel very old calling me Miss Howard. I'm at your service any time, Mr. Godfrey. Would you like me to tell you now or after lunch?"

"Leave it till after lunch, I suggest," Tony cut in. "I'm starving."

A few moments later Carla told them that their table was ready, so the five young people followed the proprietress into the dining-room.

"Yes, I see what you mean about the food," Sue sighed an hour later. "I shall certainly have to watch my diet. Now, where shall we go for a talk?"

"I've asked Peter if we can borrow his private sitting-room," Chris said. "We'll be completely on our own in there."

He led his companions behind the bar and into the Hamperls' private apartment. Peter was still serving drinks and promised that Carla herself would bring coffee in to them a little later.

"Now then, young lady," Chris said when they were settled. "Let's have your story."

"I don't know what's so important about it," Sue said. "It was certainly queer and seemed very strange at the time. But that was five months ago. Well—here goes."

She launched into an account of her visit to the Island after her father's death, how her aunt had been laid up, and how she had decided to visit the German Underground Hospital. Then she went on to describe her strange experiences in its dismal depths, and her peculiar feelings. Finally she told them about the unfinished tunnel, the blue glow, and the tall, fair creatures she had seen before she fainted.

"They looked like my idea of angels," she ended.

Three

"How did you manage to get out of the Hospital?" Morrey asked.

"I don't really know," Sue confessed. "I found myself on the hillside near one of the several escape shafts that the Germans built for use in case of emergency. I soon felt better and made my way back to my hotel. But the experience was so strange that I was frightened to tell anyone, even Aunt Jenny, about it until after I'd returned home from my holiday. Then I mentioned it to Sir Anthony Blackham, the surgeon for whom I work."

"And what did he say?" Chris asked.

"I thought he'd laugh at me," replied Sue, "but he didn't. He questioned me closely and treated it all very seriously."

"Then what happened?"

"Sir Anthony told my story to his brother, who has a top job in the Ministry of Defence. Next day I had a visit from this Mr. Harold Blackham, who asked me to keep silent about my experience. He said something about the Official Secrets Act, and made me sign a paper."

"How did you come to be sent here?" asked Chris.

"I heard nothing for a long time. Then last week my boss said that his brother wanted to see me again. Mr. Blackham came to my home and told me that his Ministry would very much like me to go to Guernsey. They wanted me to meet four people to whom I should repeat my story. He gave me your name, Mr. Godfrey, and told me that all arrangements would be made for me. So—here I am."

"It certainly is a remarkable account," Chris said. "Have you ever had any—well—any sensitive experiences before? You know—this chill you felt, the horrible feeling you had outside the mortuary, and then this eagerness to follow the blue glow in the unfinished tunnel?"

"Never," Sue said firmly. "I've always prided myself that I'm not easily scared. Nor do I believe in ghosts. Why I felt like I did, I can't explain. I've certainly never experienced anything like it before."

"These Beings that you saw. Can you describe them in more detail?" Serge asked.

"Well," Sue replied thoughtfully, "I can only say that they looked very much like the pictures I have seen of angels, but they hadn't any wings. I couldn't say whether they were male or female. None had a beard, and they all seemed dressed alike."

"This blue glow," Serge went on, "I'm interested in it. Can you say more about it?"

"Only that it seemed to come from within them," the girl replied reflectively. "Perhaps it might better be described as a blue haze about them, except that it emitted this faint blue light."

Serge nodded—as if the description was no surprise to him.

"Did you hear them speaking?" asked Morrey. "What were their voices like?"

"Low and musical," Sue told him. "But I didn't hear much before I passed out."

"And you've no idea how you came to be on the hillside when you recovered?"

"None. I certainly didn't get out myself."

"What happened when you failed to return to the entrance? Did they start to search for you?" asked Chris.

"They were just about to when I went to tell them that I was all right. I think they were waiting to close down, so they didn't question me very closely. All I said was that I must have wandered out through an escape shaft. For some reason I didn't want to tell them about the 'Angels'."

All four fired many more questions at Sue until they had learned from her everything possible about her encounter with the so-called "Angels".

"What I can't understand," said Tony, "is that no one else seems to have had the same experience. After all, it happened to you five months ago and there must have been hundreds of visitors to the Hospital since then."

"I can explain that," Chris told his companions. "There was a rock-fall in the mouth of the unfinished tunnel just about the time that Sue went down it. She was probably the last person to do so, for the Authorities immediately barred further entry because of the fear of more rock-falls."

"Seems funny to me," mused Tony. "Do you think it was a coincidence that this rockfall happened and stopped anyone else seeing the 'Angels'?"

"That's something we don't know," answered Chris. "But if it wasn't a coincidence then maybe it was caused by the 'Angels' themselves."

"There's only one way to find out," declared Tony, "and that is to go along the unfinished tunnel ourselves."

"And that's just what I propose to do," Chris assured them. "We'll do it tomorrow. Meanwhile I have in my case a mass of reports of U.F.O. sightings over the Island. I want us all to spend the afternoon going through them to see if they have any common factor. Would you like to help us, Sue?"

"If you think I'll be any good—yes. Just what do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to divide these U.F.O. reports between the five of us, and I want us all to read our allocation carefully. Then I want us to compare notes and to see if there is anything in common about them," Chris told her.

"And if there isn't?" Morrey asked.

"Then at least we'll still have Sue's story to start off with. We can do what she did, and see if we, too, can meet the 'Angels'," Chris smiled. "But that's for tomorrow."

"Shall we be allowed to enter the unfinished tunnel?" Tony asked. "I thought you said it was closed to visitors."

"So it is—but we won't exactly be classed as visitors. No, I have full authority from U.N.E.X.A. to do whatever is necessary, and I can call for any local help I need."

Chris led the others back into the public bar, thanking Peter and Carla for their courtesy. Then he went to his room and returned with several dozen folders which he divided among his friends.

"That's the bulk of them," he said. "There are a few more, but I'm sure there are sufficient reports here to show if they have anything to tell us."

They each took their share of the folders and went to their respective bedrooms.

"Don't fall asleep over them," Chris warned Tony.

On the fifty-fourth floor of the United Nations Building in New York was the U.N.E.X.A. suite. It was there that Sir William Gillanders, a tall, grizzled Australian, had his office. The smaller office next to his was empty. This belonged to his Deputy, Chris Godfrey, who was away on a special assignment. Now, including Sir William, there were six men in the Director's office.

"Mr. Director, can you tell us when you expect a report from your men on the spot?"

The question was asked by the Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation. He was a rotund and balding

Frenchman named Cellier, and he was greatly respected by all who served with or under him. It was the question that each of the other four wanted to ask themselves. They waited tensely for the answer.

"Gentlemen, we must give them time. My Deputy and his colleagues arrived in Guernsey only yesterday, and today they will be meeting the young lady who declares that she saw these 'Beings'. I've called for a preliminary report to be made as quickly as possible. I'm sure Chris Godfrey will lose no time in getting into touch with me," the Director replied.

"If the presence of alien creatures is confirmed, I take it that you will request the Security Council for immediate action," said another of those present. He was in the uniform of an American general, and the others addressed him as General Whittle.

"Obviously the matter will be reported first to the President, and then to the Council," M. Cellier replied stiffly. Did these military men think he didn't know his duty? Or how important it would be if the presence of alien Beings was confirmed on Earth?

"Shall we try and be calm about this?" said Mr. McIver, the British Civil Servant. "If this is confirmed as the first contact between the human race and Beings from Space, it will be impossible to exaggerate its importance."

"Or its danger," declared the General. "It will be a disaster if these Creatures are allowed to contaminate our people."

"Come, come, General," McIver protested. "You have no right to assume that Beings from Space will be hostile. They could well be benevolent."

"We must not risk it," Whittle thundered, his face flushing. "The trouble with you civilians is that you don't recognise danger until it is too late."

Mr. Li Yung, the Chinese delegate, then spoke.

"Are we not forgetting two things?" he said. "First—that we don't know yet whether there is, or has been, a visitation from Space. Second—that it is the Security Council, backed by the General Assembly, that will decide on what action is to be taken, if any."

"A lot of old women," exploded the General. "While they are having their interminable debates the Earth could be taken over by the Aliens. Let us destroy or at least intern any that we find."

"What a bloodthirsty person you are, General," Mr. McIver protested. "You may be in command of all U.N.O. Forces, but thank goodness you have to obey the Security Council."

General Whittle flushed, but he said nothing. If these silly nincompoops, or those on the so-called Security Council, thought they could prevent him from doing his plain duty to the Peoples of the Earth, then they were greatly mistaken. Whichever way the debate went, the General knew precisely what he was going to do.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Chris and the others met as arranged in a corner of the public lounge at the Hotel. When they were settled Chris asked them for their reports. Sue was given the privilege of leading off.

"I don't know about yours," the girl began, "but all my reports were of sightings over this Island."

"Mine were, too," Morrey declared, and Tony and Serge agreed.

"Yes, all these sightings took place over Guernsey, and never before—or from any other place—have so many been reported. Now, does any particular pattern emerge?" asked Chris.

His friends were silent for a moment, and then Serge spoke.

"Two things struck me," the Russian said. "One is that they come in cycles of about three months. The other is that most of the reports come from near the German Hospital."

Morrey and Tony nodded. Now that their friend had pointed this out their own reports tallied. Morrey added that the last batch of reports were dated three months ago. If the previous pattern was to be repeated, they were due for more sightings at any time.

"Can you tell me the date you went into the Underground Hospital?" Chris asked Sue.

"Not exactly," the girl replied. "Oh, but wait a minute. Auntie and I were here during the last week in April. I think it was on the Wednesday that she wasn't too well, and I went to the Hospital and saw the 'Angels'. What would that make it?"

Chris consulted his diary.

"The twenty-fifth," he announced. Then he produced a plan of the Underground Hospital and Ammunition Store.

It was then that the young men realised the extent of this vast subterranean construction. The Ammunition Store was even larger than the Hospital, and consisted of two long parallel tunnels connected to each other by a series of cross tunnels. It was there that many thousands of tons of ammunition, high explosives and gun-shells had been stored towards the end of the war.

Right next to it was the Hospital, a similar but smaller construction. This time the connecting tunnels formed the hospital wards and other essential parts of the undertaking.

"There," said Chris, pointing to a place on the plan, "is the unfinished tunnel."

All five pored over the paper with the greatest interest. If Sue's story was to be believed, it was here that the "Angels" had established themselves. Perhaps they had finished off the tunnel in some way unknown. Would they return here when the next flight of U.F.Os was due? It was an exciting prospect.

The five discussed the possibility for a long time. Only when they noticed that they were alone in the lounge did they realise how late it was. Peter, waiting patiently behind the bar, had difficulty in stifling his yawns.

"I think it's time we turned in," Chris told the others. "We'll visit the Hospital immediately after breakfast. But what about you, Sue? Do you feel like coming along with us, or would you rather wait here until we get back?"

Sue looked indignantly at her friends.

"What do you take me for?" she demanded. "A coward? No, I'll come with you. Then I can show you where I saw the 'Angels'."

"Right. Then we'll meet here at half-past eight, have breakfast, and go in our car to the Hospital. We can all squeeze into the car, can't we?"

"If we can't, Sue can sit on my lap," Morrey laughed, "but I'm sure we can."

Carla had already retired, so they wished a tired Peter "goodnight" and went to their rooms. Chris sat on his bed for some time before undressing. What would tomorrow bring? Was Sue's story a figment of her imagination? Or would evidence of the "Angels" be there?

Four

Unfortunately the weather deteriorated during the night. Next morning a grey mist covered the Island, and all was damp and miserable. Not a very good atmosphere for venturing into the Hospital, Chris thought. Still—the job had to be done, and once they were inside weather conditions above ground would be unimportant.

There was an air of suppressed excitement as Sue and the four astronauts worked their way through a hearty breakfast. Carla's invitation to take more had to be reluctantly declined—even by Tony.

"I'll bring the car round to the front of the Hotel," Morrey said as they rose from the table. "Can we be ready for 'off' in ten minutes?"

When they met by the reception desk, Chris had a tape recorder slung over his shoulder. He intended to record faithfully everything they heard in the underground labyrinth.

"I wonder if there will be many other people there today," mused Sue as they sped along with Morrey at the wheel.

"There won't be anyone," Chris told her. "I—er—arranged for the Hospital to be closed to visitors today. We shall be the only people inside."

"How did you do that?" the girl demanded.

"Oh, the Bailiff had a little message from my Chief, and he's pleased to co-operate," Chris explained airily.

"The Bailiff? Who's he?" Tony asked.

"The Chief Magistrate and Representative of the Crown on the Island," said Chris. "Sir Billy thought it would be better if there were no other visitors when we start our investigations."

"Then we won't have to pay to go in?" smiled Tony.

"No. We go in for nothing," his leader laughed. "Does that please you?"

The banter continued until they reached the car park for the Hospital. Because of Sir Billy's request to the Bailiff, no other vehicle was there. They climbed out and walked towards the entrance. First they went down a sloping road, bordered on either side with grass and earth-covered banks. In front was the concrete archway which was the main entrance. Chris led the others through it.

On the right was the pay desk that Sue had described, but instead of the woman, two men stood there. As soon as they saw Chris's party approaching they came forward to meet them.

"Good morning," one of them said. "My name is Desmoulins, and I'm the manager of the museum and Hospital. This is Mr. Carter, my engineer. Are you Mr. Godfrey?"

Chris confirmed that he was, and introduced his companions.

"What exactly do you want us to do, Mr. Godfrey?" Desmoulins asked. "Carter and I are completely at your service."

"Thank you. I'm not sure that there's anything we want at the moment. You have a large-scale plan of the Hospital? Good. We'll take it with us, though I believe there are a number on the walls of the tunnels."

Chris took the stiff-backed plan that the manager had brought. Then he had another idea.

"Have you any electric torches?" he asked. "If so, I'd like to borrow a couple. Also, I wonder if you could arrange to turn off the lights for a period of five minutes only in, say, half an hour's time. Make it exactly eleven-thirty, then we won't be taken by surprise."

The manager agreed, and Mr. Carter compared his watch with Chris's. They must avoid being taken unawares when they were plunged into darkness.

With Chris leading, they passed through a door beyond the pay box and went through the wide entrance to the Hospital. This was the museum section; here were displayed articles from the German Occupation, photographs, proclamations, uniforms and weapons—all very interesting. However, they were concerned with something even more important, so they hurried through the exhibition to an exit at the far end which led into the tunnels proper.

For the first time Sue hesitated. She was about to enter the tunnel when she recognised the same strange sensation that she had experienced five months before. She felt a peculiar chill, and she was a little scared. But of course she couldn't let her new friends see this. She followed Chris into the gloomy, echoing tunnels that were the Underground Hospital.

"Whew!" breathed Tony as they passed inside. "It's spooky!"

Certainly the Hospital was as strange as Sue had described it, and they began to understand the girl's feelings. Bare electric light bulbs barely illuminated the long empty caverns. The drip of water was the only sound—except that made by the five young people themselves.

"Come on," Chris said sharply. "Let's explore."

Following the plan closely, they went past the numerous wards, the storerooms, the kitchens, the former cinema, and finally the mortuary. Sue shrank back from entering this dread tunnel. Although she was with four young men, she still felt the presence of the unquiet spirits of the long-dead German soldiers.

"Come on, Sue. You're not scared, are you?" Morrey asked with a smile. "Here—hold my arm."

Gratefully the girl hung on to the husky American and allowed herself to be dragged into the mortuary.

"You say you saw a faint blue aura?" asked Chris. "I don't see anything."

"Nor me," Tony and Morrey said in unison. Serge remained silent.

"Don't tell us you can see the blue glow," Tony teased him.

"No," the Russian said quietly, "but I can understand how Sue felt. There is unrest here. No peace. It is as if someone is crying out for help."

"Oh, come off it, Serge," Tony grinned, giving his friend a playful dig in the ribs. "Don't tell us you can feel the spirits of the soldiers who died down here so many years ago."

Serge didn't reply. He looked serious and thoughtful. How could he explain his feelings to his friends? They would only say that he was hypersensitive. Well—perhaps he was.

Chris looked at his watch.

"The lights will be going off in six minutes," he said. "Have we time to get to the unfinished tunnel?"

Sue was unable to help. She had now recovered somewhat, but her memory of this part of her previous visit was very hazy. She did recall how, at this point, she had panicked. For how long she had stumbled along the gloomy caverns she had no idea. Nor did she recall exactly where she found the unfinished tunnel.

"We ought to just make it," Morrey, who had been studying the plan, said. "Come on. It's this way."

So the five hurried along, with Sue secretly relieved to be leaving that awful mortuary behind.

"There it is," Tony called out.

Ahead was the barrier with a large red notice.

"Danger of rock-falls. Entrance strictly forbidden."

They stopped at the barrier and Chris glanced at his watch. Two minutes to go.

"Is there any real danger of more rock-falls?" asked Tony.

"If there is, we'll have to risk it," Morrey said. "After all, we have a job to do."

"Come on," Chris urged, stepping round the barrier and switching on a torch. Tony and Morrey followed, but Sue hesitated until the pressure of Serge's arm urged her forward.

The unfinished tunnel was, of course, unlit. Only the light from behind illuminated it a little way ahead. Guided by the beam of the torch, they moved forward cautiously.

"This must be the rock-fall," said Tony, who was leading by a few yards.

In their path was a mound of rocks which had obviously fallen from the roof. It almost blocked their passage, but they were just able to squeeze round one side of it. Then suddenly the distant lights went out as Chris had arranged. Sue felt a shiver of fear, even though the torch that Chris held was a powerful one.

"I want to try an experiment," Chris told the others. "That's why I arranged for the lights to be cut off for a few minutes. I propose to extinguish this torch."

A gasp from the girl made her friends turn to her with concern.

"You'll be all right, Sue," Morrey assured her. "We'll all stick closely together. You can hold my arm if you want to."

She tried to smile, but it was an effort. She told them she would be fine.

"I want to see if we can detect the glow you mentioned," Chris explained to her.

The blackness was so intense it seem solid. As Chris switched off the torch it seemed to hit them. Sue felt giddy and had to grip the American's arm to steady herself. Each of the others felt around to touch each other, for the complete absence of light was disorientating. Even Tony felt peculiar and was glad to hear the voices of his companions.

"I can't see anything," Morrey declared. "There's no blue glow ahead."

But which way was "ahead"? They could only guess from their memory of the glimmer behind them. They had completely lost all sense of direction.

"Can you see anything, Sue?" Chris asked.

The girl hesitated. She was overcoming her fear with the help of the voices of her friends. She didn't want to mislead them, but she didn't wish them to think that her story had been just the product of a lively imagination.

"I'm not sure," she whispered.

"Well, I can't see anything," Tony declared stoutly. "How about you, Morrey?"

"Everything is like jet," the American replied. "There's no difference in the blackness in any direction."

Serge was silent. He couldn't honestly be sure, but—and it was more a sensation than a conviction—he thought there might be slight lessening in the darkness in one direction. Was this the way ahead?

"Oh, switch on the torch, please, Chris," pleaded Sue. "I've had enough of this."

"All right. Here goes," the astronaut laughed, and the next second a beam of light cut through the Stygian blackness. The girl thought it was the most welcome sight she had ever seen.

"Would you like to go back now, Sue?" Chris asked.

"No," the girl answered bravely. "I know you will go forward, so I'll come along with you."

Did they believe her story? So far there hadn't been the slightest confirmation of her account, and this worried Sue more than the weird experience of being in such a strange place. If only she could make them believe that her story was true!

"Come on then," Chris called, "but watch out for loose rock."

With the torch beam peering into the inky blackness ahead, the little party moved forward,

"We'll keep the second torch as a reserve," declared their leader as they walked slowly along the tunnel.

They had gone perhaps some hundred metres when the distant lights behind them came on again, but they were now so far down the unfinished tunnel that the lights were of no help.

The girl tried to recall her former visit. Certainly there wasn't the blue aura that she remembered so well before. It ought to have been very noticeable by then, but she couldn't see the faintest sign of it. Also she remembered that at just about that spot she had begun to lose her fear of the unknown way ahead. Later she had been positively attracted by the glow, until she had at last seen the "Angels". But there was nothing of that now—no glow, and no loss of fear.

"You had seen the glow at this point?" Chris asked, and Sue agreed that she had.

"Then if it is associated with the 'Angels', they cannot be here at the moment. However, we can still look for the cavern in which you saw them."

"Let's take a look at the walls," Morrey suggested, for Sue had described them as being shining, hard and cool. If the whole thing hadn't been a figment of the girl's imagination, then the glistening wall should be there to substantiate her story.

As for Sue, her heart beat rapidly at Morrey's suggestion. More than anything else she wanted these four young men to believe her. They mustn't think she was just a neurotic girl who had tried to attract attention to herself by concocting an amazing story. Well—they would soon know if she was telling the truth or not.

In response to Morrey's words Chris turned the torch on to the tunnel wall and walked right up to it, the others following closely at his heels. He paused and then drew in a sharp breath. The rocky wall was reflecting the light of the torch, and they could even see their own images mirrored by the shining surface. He stretched out his hand and touched it. As Sue had described, it was smooth, cool and hard.

So the girl was right! This part, at least, of her story had been proved. But what about the rest? Tony, Morrey and Serge crowded round their leader, each studying the tunnel wall with fascinated interest.

"I've never seen anything like it," muttered Morrey as he fingered the glossy surface.

"See how flat and smooth the walls are," observed Serge. "Certainly this part of the tunnel wasn't excavated by the same means as the rest."

"Then how was it done? And by who?" Tony asked.

" 'By whom'," Chris corrected his young friend. "I can only speculate. It could have been done by Sue's Angels, possibly by a laser beam—certainly by some technique I've never heard of."

"Then they could have come from another world?" gasped Sue. "You know—people who know a lot more than we do? Or at least know about different things?"

"It is certainly possible," Serge said thoughtfully. "It has always been assumed that if any Beings from another planet ever visited Earth, they would have a technology far in advance of our own. We haven't yet been able to send people beyond our solar system."

"Yes—and the nearest system to our own from which Visitors might have come is four and a quarter light years away," Morrey put in.

"Is that far?" Sue asked.

"A fair distance," Tony laughed. "Light travels at one hundred and eighty six thousand miles a second. A light year is the distance a ray of light would travel in a year. It takes the light from the nearest solar system to our own over four years to reach us."

"And we can only travel at much less than the speed of light," Chris added. "To cross the vast distances of Space a velocity far in excess of that of light must be achieved. So—if there are Visitors from Space, they must be wonderful people indeed."

Five

General Whittle didn't like being accused of being bloodthirsty. He was a professional military man and he had his duty to do. During his career he had seen death in many violent forms. He neither liked it nor shrank from it. If it was necessary to save Earth from extra-terrestrial contamination he would not hesitate to kill. He had no wish for his fellow humans, or himself, to be subjugated by a superior race.

Whatever the decision of the Security Council, or for that matter of the General Assembly, he was convinced that his paramount duty was to destroy any visitors from Space. And destroy them he would. It was his duty to Mankind as a whole, and it far outweighed his loyalty to the Security Council of the United Nations. If reports from the astronauts, who had been sent to investigate, confirmed that Aliens had made their base in the old German Underground Hospital, then he would destroy it completely. And—hopefully—the Aliens with it.

Edward Whittle was a strange man. He had joined the U.S. Army after graduating at college, and it had become his whole life. Unmarried, General Whittle had few friends or relations.

Nor did he seem to need any. He'd climbed through the Army ranks until, five years before, he'd become a five-star general. Two years ago he'd been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all U.N.O. Forces. His greatest ambition had been achieved. He intended to justify it fully.

Whittle was not a tall man, but he was very fit and took great care of himself. No one, except perhaps a few U.N.O. officials, knew his age. It was rumoured that he used hair dye to keep his hair so sleek and black. But this was only tittle-tattle and no one knew if it were true. His greatest fear, indeed his only fear, was of getting old and having to leave his beloved profession.

Eventually this time would come, but meanwhile the General's burning desire was to carve his name on the tablets of history. However, there had been no wars in which he could have won glory, no campaigns in which he could have won fame. Maybe this possible invasion by Aliens would be his great opportunity. He was determined that it should not be neglected.

The U.F.O. sightings had not really been substantiated. The whole thing might be nothing but imagination. Only the report of a young girl, if it was to be believed, positively referred to creatures that were not human. Well—if it did turn out to be true, he would attack and destroy them utterly.

To have crossed the vast distances of Space these Aliens—if they existed—must command very advanced techniques, which were no doubt potentially deadly. However, the General himself had a few new ones on his top-secret list, and it would be interesting to try them out. A swift attack before the Aliens could establish themselves was obviously the right tactic.

The small party deep inside the Underground Hospital spent some little time examining the walls of the tunnel. No longer could the excavation be described as "unfinished". It seemed to have been completed in a wonderful way—a way that could only be guessed at. Chris faithfully noted his impressions on his tape recorder and invited the other astronauts to add theirs. As soon as they returned to the outside world these would be transmitted by telephone to U.N.E.X.A. Headquarters, where Sir Billy would be waiting for them.

"Are we going on?" asked Tony.

Chris switched off the recorder and slung it back on his shoulder.

"Why not?" he replied.

"Yes, let's go on," urged Sue. Now that her four new friends had seen the glistening walls for themselves, now that the first part of her story had been borne out, she was anxious that Chris and the others should confirm as much of the rest as possible.

With the torch beam probing ahead, with the images of the explorers reflected dimly in the glass-like walls, they moved carefully forward. Then, almost before they realised it, the five young people had reached their objective. They found themselves in a spacious underground vault. The torch shone back from the distant wall. Chris swivelled the beam round to get an idea of its shape and size.

It must have been fully fifty metres in diameter and looked quite circular. A quick switch of the beam upwards revealed a domed roof with a round hole in the centre. From this ran a shaft which seemed to stretch upwards towards the surface. Was this the entrance and exit of the Visitors they had christened "the Angels"?

As they stood in silent awe looking around this subterranean cathedral, a thousand thoughts flooded through their minds. Sue's were mainly of relief that here was further proof that she hadn't lied or been dreaming. Tony's were of wonder as to how such a vast underground hall could have been carved out of the rocky hill. What had happened to the debris? Surely some thousands of tons of stone had been removed. Yet it semed that no one on the Island had reported such a vast deposit anywhere on the surface.

Morrey was intrigued as to how the job had been done. True, laser beams had been suggested, but he'd never yet heard of their being used for tunnelling. Like Tony, he was puzzled as to what had happened to the rock. It couldn't have been spirited away. Or could it?

Serge was filled with wonder at this evidence of the "Angels' " visitation. He still wasn't sure whether or not he could detect any of the aura they had left behind. Sometimes he fancied he could see a faint blue tinge. At other times he sensed a feeling of wellbeing and peace.

Chris was gravely concerned with his own responsibility in the matter. He had been instructed to investigate and report to U.N.E.X.A. Had there indeed been a visitation from creatures from another World? He would have to report that the evidence suggested there had.

What a tremendous thing this would be! He was fully aware that visitations from beyond the solar system had been reported for many years—centuries even. There are biblical references and cave drawings that are said to confirm them. But the evidence they now saw before them was absolutely conclusive. From now onward no one could have any doubt but that there were living and highly intelligent creatures beyond our Earth.

What impact this would have Chris couldn't even begin to speculate. Naturally fear of the unknown was likely to predominate. The psychological impact of contact with extraterrestrial beings would be impossible to minimise. Would Earth benefit or suffer? He couldn't forecast, but he believed that the sophisticated Beings, or "Angels" as they had now started to think of them, would bring nothing but good. What benefit would it be to them to destroy the Earth or even harm its inhabitants?

"Let's get back and report," he breathed.

It was a silent and very thoughtful quintet that made their way back to the main tunnel. Chris switched off the torch and they stood in the light from the electric bulbs. Mr. Desmoulins was waiting for them somewhat anxiously.

"Is everything all right?" he burst out with relief as the five reappeared from the unfinished tunnel. He could see that they all looked serious and shaken.

"Yes, everything is fine," Chris assured him, "but a cup of coffee would be most welcome. Where can we get some?"

"I have some ready for you in the pay box," smiled the manager. "Did the blackout work all right?"

"It was most efficiently done," Chris told him. "Please thank Mr. Carter for his help."

He didn't want to say anything to the manager until he had reported to New York.

They drank the coffee gratefully. It was good to be out in the fresh air. The sun was shining, and the grass and trees looked particularly green. Chris thanked Mr. Desmoulins and his engineer cordially. Then the little party made its way to the car park.

"Where to now?" asked Morrey, squeezing behind the wheel.

"We'll take Sue back to the hotel first," Chris decided. "Then I must go and see the Bailiff."

Sue felt a little despondent. She had enjoyed the company of these four young men. Didn't they want her any more? Must she now go home? Of course she was delighted that her story had been confirmed—at least such part of it as had been possible. If only the "Angels" had been present! Or even the blue glow that had seemed to come from them. Perhaps then they would have wanted her to stay with them a little longer.

"Come on, Susie. Snap out of it," grinned Tony who had been watching the girl's thoughtful expression. "What's the matter?"

She forced a smile.

"Now you've seen the glossy walls and the underground hall I don't suppose you'll be needing me any more," she said a little tremulously

"Rubbish!" Chris exclaimed. "You were sensitive to the blue aura. We'll need you to help us detect it when the 'Angels' come again."

"May I? Then you want me to stay a little longer?"

"I'm sure Sir Anthony Blackham can be persuaded to release you for a while longer," the astronaut smiled. "In any case my Chief will arrange it."

So it was a more cheerful Sue that they had deposited at the Hotel Le Saumarez before going to see the Bailiff.

Sir Arnold Williams, the representative of the Crown on the

Island, was a short man with a ruddy complexion and a friendly manner. His hearty greeting and bluff words concealed a keen and analytical brain. Having exchanged a number of confidential messages with the British Government and with the Director of U.N.E.X.A., Sir Arnold was eagerly awaiting the opportunity to help the four astronauts who had been sent to his Island on such a critical mission.

The Royal Court House, a grey stone building near the War Memorial, housed the Bailiff's office, the Law Courts, and many of the administrative departments of the Island government. Chris and his three companions were ushered into the Bailiff's private room, where Sir Arnold greeted them heartily. But as soon as the waitress bringing in the coffee had left, and the door closed firmly behind her, the Bailiff's manner changed and he turned sharply to his visitors.

"Well," he asked, "have you discovered anything?"

"Yes, we have," Chris replied seriously. "To my mind there is little doubt but that Guernsey has had Visitors from Space. We haven't met any yet," he added with a smile, "but I think it's certain that something strange has happened in the Underground Hospital. I have a record on tape here of what we found. Perhaps you would like to hear it."

They listened to the recording in silence, Sir Arnold concentrating on every word of Chris's description. When it was over he let out a sharp breath.

"So!" he exclaimed, "you are convinced that the new excavations can only have been made by the Visitors? What are we to do now?"

"The nature of the new part of the tunnel, the mysterious disposal of the excavated material, the new underground hall, convinced us that something strange has been happening. One explanation is that the U.F.Os are real and have been bringing in Beings with techniques unknown on Earth. Our first job must be to relay this tape to my Chief. Can we get through to New York?"

The Bailiff leaned over and spoke briefly into the phone on his desk.

"Our operator says she knows the number and it will take a few minutes to get through. Now, what about this drink that's going cold?" he said.

Before they had had time to empty their cups the phone bell tinkled and the Bailiff picked it up.

"Your call," he said, handing the instrument over to Chris.

"Can I speak to the Director?" he asked over the wire. "It's urgent. Deputy Director speaking."

He held on to the phone and was just about to grumble at the delay when he heard a voice at the other end.

"Billy? It's Chris. We've been underground and found it very interesting. Listen to this tape I made of our discoveries."

He switched on his machine and held the phone near it. The others remained still as Chris's words were carried over the Atlantic. When the recording was over Chris picked up the phone again.

"What do you think?" he asked the distant Sir Billy.

"Seems fairly conclusive," the Director's voice came back, "but it only goes so far. It isn't quite like contact with the Visitors themselves."

"I agree," replied Chris, "but according to an analysis we've made of U.F.O. sightings around here, we're due for another series at any time now. I propose we stay on here and await them."

"Do that," Sir Billy agreed, "but do be careful and cautious. We have no idea what the object of the visits is—if we are indeed getting visitors."

Tony tugged at Chris's sleeve urgently.

"Ask him if Sue can stay on and help us," he whispered.

But there was no need for Chris to pose the question. He heard the Director's chuckle over the phone.

"This is a very sensitive instrument," Sir Billy reminded his Deputy, "and I heard Tony's request. Yes—Miss Howard can stay on as long as you think it necessary. Now may I have a word with the Bailiff?"

Chris wished his Chief goodbye and handed the phone over to Sir Arnold. The Bailiff listened intently to Sir Billy for some minutes, making only single-syllable replies. At last he, too, said farewell to the Director and ended the call. Then he turned to the four astronauts.

"Sir William has requested me to make every effort to keep reports of future U.F.O. sightings absolutely confidential, and I have agreed. Our local radio and press will make no mention of them, but I will ensure that they are sent to you immediately. Now, is there anything I can do for you at the moment?"

"There's just one thing," Chris replied thoughtfully. "Can you get one of your surveyors to measure and draw up a plan of the new excavations made by the Visitors? We'll go along with him to help."

"I think that can be arranged," Sir Arnold replied, "and I wouldn't be averse to taking a peep at them myself."

"O.K., sir. We'll fix that," Chris laughed. "Now we'd better get back to our hotel."

With mutual expressions of thanks and goodwill, the astronauts took leave of the Bailiff. Soon they reached Le Saumarez where Sue Howard was waiting anxiously for them.

Six

Sir Billy recorded his entire conversation with Chris, including the tape, and later it was typed for distribution to the U.N.O. Secretary-General, the President and certain officials. Included in its limited distribution was a copy to General Whittle.

The General received this just before retiring to bed that night. He was staying in a hotel on Fifth Avenue in New York, which was handy for his office in the U.N.O. Building. He read the typescript of Chris's report no less than three times. Then he reached for the ever-bubbling coffee percolator which was his only weakness.

So there was evidence of Aliens! If this report from Godfrey was accurate—and he'd no reason to doubt it—then someone capable of using techniques far in advance of those of Earth, had been in that Hospital. True—the Aliens were not there at that moment, so the General put aside his first thought—to blow the Hospital up at once. Better, he decided, to wait until the Aliens were inside. Then he would destroy them all utterly.

One thought did make the General hesitate a little. In destroying the Underground Hospital and the Aliens, he would also destroy the Island of Guernsey. It could, of course, be evacuated. But that might alert the Aliens to their danger and give them the opportunity to take the initiative. The sacrifice of a few thousand lives, regrettable though that might be, would be justified if it meant saving Earth from the Aliens.

There was, of course, the matter of the four astronauts sent by U.N.E.X.A. They might be saved if their Director ordered them to leave immediately after reporting the arrival of Aliens. He would see the Director first thing next day, though he wouldn't feel justified in explaining his reasons.

Sir Billy Gillanders didn't like General Whittle. He'd never had much to do with him in the past, but this question of the U.F.O.s had brought them into contact. He received the General very coolly.

"I want you to order your men home immediately they have reported the possible arrival of Aliens," Whittle said briskly.

"Oh? And may I ask why?" Sir Billy asked icily.

"No, you may not. I have my reasons."

"Then I shall do no such thing. I shall leave it entirely to the discretion of my Deputy."

"Very well. Then the responsibility will be yours," Whittle said. "I shall report your refusal to the Secretary General."

"Do that," Sir Billy said sweetly. "Now I'm sure you're far too busy to waste further time on me."

Back in his own office the General snorted fire for a while. They were all the same, these scientists and civil servants. They had no conception of the real danger that Earth could be in. The history books of our planet are full of accounts of secret infiltration by enemies. The Trojan Horse idea has been repeated in every age. Not if he could help it would the Aliens get a foothold on an unsuspecting Earth.

General Whittle rang for an aide and requested that he should fetch detailed maps and all possible information about the Island of Guernsey. The young officer, surprised, went off to fulfil this unusual task. When he returned the General settled down happily to plan his course of action.

"Relax, Sue," Tony laughed, seeing the girl's anxious look. "Sir Billy says we can keep your services as long as we need them. So you just be useful and respectful to us, young lady."

In answer Sue pushed out the tip of her tongue. She was so happy to remain on the Island, and she hoped that she could help her four new friends with the exciting work they were doing.

They had all settled down for a chat when they heard a distant phone ring. A moment later Peter came into the lounge.

"Chris," he said in a low voice, "it's the Bailiff. Would you like to take the call in my office?"

"Thanks, Peter, I will," Chris answered, rising.

The curiosity of the others was satisfied two minutes later, when Chris returned.

"Sir Arnold has fixed up for a couple of surveyors to visit the Hospital in the morning and wants us to show them what we need. He also says that the Island Police have been alerted for a fresh batch of U.F.O. sightings which they will flash to us immediately. He suggested that if we leave the Hotel at night, one of us should remain behind for a possible phone call."

"That can be you, Tony," Morrey grinned. "You won't mind, will you?"

"It's a lie," the young astronaut protested indignantly. "If one of us must stay by the phone, we'll draw lots for it."

"Calm down," smiled Chris. "We'll fix it somehow. Now, who wants to visit the Hospital in the morning with the surveyors?"

All the others, including Sue, volunteered.

"All right," their leader said, "we'll all go. U.F.O. sightings have only been reported after dark, so we'll not need to leave anyone behind. However, we'd better start our rota tonight. Let's cut cards to decide the order. Lowest card first, highest last."

They borrowed a pack of playing cards from Peter and proceeded to cut them. Morrey would be the one to stay on duty that evening, followed by Serge, Tony, Sue and Chris.

"Come on. Let's have a look around St. Peter Port," Tony burst out. "I haven't really seen the place yet."

So the five young people wandered round the Island's only town, looking at shops, going through the market, standing on the quay. It was growing dark when they drove back to the Hotel. None of the many people who must have seen this light-hearted quintet wandering about the town could have guessed how vital was the task they were engaged on. Nor could they know that events might happen in the next few days that could change the course of human history.

"Where are you lot off to?" asked Morrey as the others rose from their evening meal.

It was a glorious night outside. The moon had not yet risen, and the stars shone brilliantly from a cloudless sky of black velvet. On such a night as this it would be great if a U.F.O. came into sight. And it could happen, if their assumption was correct that more sightings were just about due.

"Let's have a walk along the shore," suggested Tony. "I could do with some fresh air before turning in."

So a few minutes later they said goodbye to Morrey and went out to breathe the night air.

They didn't talk much as they walked the thousand yards from Le Saumarez to the shore. An occasional car, headlights flaring, passed them, but otherwise there were not many people about. The shore was even more deserted, for they didn't meet a soul as they climbed to the vantage point on top of the old German fort. They seated themselves on a low stone wall and looked around them.

Sue, for the first time in her life, found the panorama of the heavens completely fascinating. Serge named the constellations to her, and also many of the stars. He pointed out Mars and Jupiter, and explained how, as planets, they differed from the other stars she could see.

"Isn't the Universe marvellous?" the girl said, her chin in her hands and her eyes roving the jewel-studded vault above.

"It is more wonderful than the human mind can appreciate," Chris agreed.

Some time later they walked slowly back to the Hotel. The moon had now risen and they stopped to look at it while the astronauts told Sue just where they had been on its wild and arid surface. She found it hard to accept that these three young men, who were walking along this quiet road with her, had actually walked on Earth's satellite many times, that they had trodden the glowing orb that was sailing serenely across the heavens.

"Any phone calls?" Chris asked Morrey when they got back.

"No, none. I wonder when anything will happen."

"We've been U.F.O. spotting, but we haven't seen a thing," Tony laughed. "Still—who knows?—they may arrive tomorrow."

And so they went to bed.

It seemed only a few minutes later when Sue heard a knocking on her bedroom door.

"Come on, Sleepy. Aren't you coming with us this morning?" Tony called from outside. Hastily she glanced at the watch on the table beside her bed. Gosh! Eight-thirty!

"Yes," she called back. "I'll be out in five minutes."

It was, in fact, ten minutes before a breathless Sue joined her friends at the breakfast table.

"Sorry I'm late," she apologised. "I didn't get off to sleep for ages. I must have been as sound as a rock when Tony knocked."

Promptly at ten o'clock the five arrived at the Underground Hospital. There were a number of cars in the park, and one bore the crest of the Bailiff. Chris led his friends to the entrance, where Mr. Desmoulins was talking to Sir Arnold.

"Hope we're not late, sir," Chris said to the Bailiff with a quick sideways glance at Sue.

"Not at all," Sir Arnold assured him. "I've just arrived myself. The surveyors are unloading their equipment."

Two men were removing a couple of theodolites from a van. They came over at once and introduced themselves to Chris and the others.

"I'm Mr. Debris, and this is Mr. Scargill," one of them said. "We're ready when you are."

The manager and the Bailiff led the way past the pay desk, through the museum and into the tunnels. Several people had been examining the war relics and Mr. Desmoulins explained that it hadn't been thought necessary to keep the public out, though of course the barrier would still stop them from going into the unfinished tunnel.

"Lead on, young man," the Bailiff said affably. "I'm anxious to see these discoveries of yours."

Seven

On the way to the unfinished tunnel they passed several little knots of people wandering about the hospital wards and stores. Some of them stared at the Bailiff and his party curiously, but those who recognised the Chief Magistrate acknowledged him courteously. No doubt they wondered what the Crown Representative and his companions were doing in that gloomy labyrinth.

The barrier with the forbidding notice was still in position at the entrance to the unfinished tunnel. Mr. Carter, the engineer, was there, too. He stepped forward to meet the Bailiff and his party.

"I've fixed up a long-lead light for you," he said when greetings were over. "Unroll this drum of cable as you go forward. It's connected up to the mains supply, and you can switch on a three-hundred-watt bulb whenever you like."

He handed the lampholder and bulb, which was protected by a wire cage, over to Tony. All the astronaut had to do was to plug the lampholder into the socket at the end of the cable on the drum. Torches would light their way until they wanted to stop. Mr. Carter pulled aside the barrier and the party entered the so-called unfinished tunnel.

Chris handed one of the torches to Sir Arnold, whilst he retained the other himself. They switched them on and then led the way. The Bailiff confessed that, though he'd been in the Underground Hospital and the Ammunition Stores many times, he'd never been inside this particular tunnel.

"There was never any reason to come into it—until now," Chris smiled as they trudged along. Soon they reached the rock-fall, and, with the assistance of Tony and Morrey, Sir Arnold made his way past it.

"We shall not be long now," Chris told the Bailiff, and he noticed he'd spoken in a whisper.

A little farther along Chris swung his torch on to the wall. It shone like glass, and Sir Arnold let out a whistle. He went up to it and examined it closely.

Meanwhile Tony and Morrey, who had been carrying the drum of cable and unrolling it as they moved forward, set it down for a rest. They too joined the others at the tunnel wall.

"No. I've never seen anything like it," Sir Arnold said in awe. "But then I'm not a technical man. And you think it has been done by laser? By the way, what is the exact meaning of 'laser'?"

"It means 'Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation'," said Tony modestly, to the applause of his companions.

"It's the name given to a process by which a beam of light is concentrated and intensified to such an extent that it can cut and bore holes," Serge explained. "It is used in very delicate operations on the eye and on the brain. Also it can be used for boring a very fine hole in a sheet of metal. But we cannot use it for drilling tunnels—yet."

"I agree it must have been done by laser," Chris told the Bailiff. "I know of nothing else that could leave such a polished finish. This is undoubtedly caused by melting and cooling. We can't do it on anything like this scale, and it will be many years before we can."

When Sir Arnold and the two surveyors, suitably impressed, were ready, they moved on. Morrey and Serge picked up the cable drum, which was now much lighter. Sue walked close behind Chris and Sir Arnold. The surveyors brought up the rear. Then Chris laid a hand on the Bailiff's arm.

"Here we are," he announced. "We're now in the underground hall made by the Visitors."

It was a silent party that stood closely together, gazing around in awe. This was increased when Tony connected the light bulb to the end of the cable from the drum. When the brilliant light came on they were all dazzled and unable to see for some seconds. Tony shielded the glare and they were able to look around.

For the first time Humans were able to see the full extent of the new excavation. As the astronauts and Sue had previously seen, it was about fifty metres in diameter and roughly the same in height. It seemed as if they were inside a great dome.

"Now you see what I mean," Chris said quietly to the Bailiff, indicating the extent of the vaulted chamber they were in. "Where could the rock from this excavation have gone? It would have made a huge mound if it had been put anywhere on the surface."

Sir Arnold was visibly impressed. So were the two surveyors. They would certainly have known about it if a huge heap of rock had suddenly appeared anywhere on the Island. So what had happened to it?

They walked all round the circular hall, and everywhere the glistening walls reflected back the glare from the powerful bulb. Only at the entrance by which they had arrived, and in the centre of the roof above, were there any breaks in the smooth and shining surface.

They all stood right in the centre of the hall and gazed up. The circular hole in the roof led upwards, but no glint of light from the outside world shone down. Mr. Debris unfolded a large-scale map and, with the help of Mr. Scargill, pinpointed as accurately as he could the place immediately above them.

It appeared to be in the centre of a thick copse, and Mr. Scargill said he knew it well. However, it had been some months since he had last wandered through its trees and undergrowth. He didn't think that many people visited the copse, so if this was the site of the entrance to the underground hall it might be some time before it was discovered. But this didn't explain what had happened to the thousands of tons of rock that had been removed. The fact that no light from above shone down seemed to suggest that the entrance, or exit, was somehow covered.

"Do you think these Visitors have purposely excavated this hall right under the copse?" Sir Arnold asked Chris. The Bailiff seemed to have accepted it as now beyond doubt that his Island had received these Beings from Space.

"They could well have done so, sir," replied Chris. "If so, then it shows that their calls here have been carefully planned."

"But why this Island?" asked Sir Arnold. "Why Guernsey?"

"I have no idea," the astronaut leader confessed. "Unless it was the Underground Hospital itself that attracted them."

"But why should it?" the Bailiff persisted.

"Again—I don't know," Chris sighed. "Maybe we'll ask them when they come again."

Sue had remained silent ever since they had entered the underground hall, and she had listened to the conversation between Chris and the Bailiff. She wondered if she had the answer to Sir Arnold's question.

She remembered that the blue aura which had surrounded the so-called "Angels" was not the first she had seen in the Hospital. She was certain that there had been a faint bluish glow in that horrible place, the mortuary. Was there any connection between the two? But of course she couldn't even mention this wild idea to the others.

At the request of the surveyors Tony fixed the portable light right in the centre of the hall. Then the two men got to work with their tapes and theodolites, measuring the height and diameter of the chamber. When they returned to their drawing boards they would prepare a large-scale plan and cross-section of this new discovery.

"Nearly finished?" Sir Arnold asked the two men. They had been at work for some time, and the Bailiff felt that he must now return to the more mundane tasks awaiting him at the Royal Court House.

"I don't think there is anything more we can do here," Chris told the others. "If Morrey and Tony will stay behind with the surveyors, Sue, Serge and I will accompany Sir Arnold back to the surface. How long do you think you will be?" he asked, turning to the surveyors.

"No more than ten to fifteen minutes," Mr. Debris assured him.

"Very well, then. Bring the light and cable along with you when you've finished," Chris told Tony and Morrey. "We mustn't leave anything behind."

"Don't you want the 'Angels' to know we've been here?" Sue asked.

"I don't suppose that would worry them too much," the leader answered. "If their objective is to contact Humans the meeting must take place soon. Remember—they must know that you yourself discovered their base, Sue."

The object of the "Angels' " visit would probably remain unknown until actual contact with them had been made. Then what would happen?

Sir Arnold, Chris, Sue and Serge made their way back to the main tunnel and out into the museum. The Bailiff was now certain that his Island had been the scene of strange and wonderful happenings. What he had seen with his own eyes had convinced him that the Underground Hospital had been visited by Beings with skills far in advance of those of Earth.

Mr. Desmoulins and Mr. Carter were waiting, and they saw Sir Arnold into his car. He didn't reply to their waves of good-bye, for he was far too deep in thought.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Sue as the car drove away.

"We'll wait for the others. Then I think we'll get Mr. Debris and Mr. Scargill to take us to that copse. I'd like to see if we can find the exit from the hall," Chris replied.

The manager of the Underground Hospital and his engineer joined them. Chris thanked them for their great assistance and then told them briefly what they had found. Both men looked startled and perhaps a little scared.

"From what this young lady saw, and from their treatment of her, I don't think we need fear these Visitors," Chris assured them. "Meanwhile it is vital that this whole matter be kept strictly confidential, and the Bailiff agrees. I trust that you will not mention to any other person what I have just told you?"

The two assured Chris that they would reveal to no one the amazing things he had told them.

"You see—our contact with these Beings has to be carefully planned," he explained.

They waited patiently for Morrey and Tony to emerge with the surveyors. At last they came, with Tony carrying the drum of coiled-up cable. He handed this back to the engineer.

"I'd like to go and have a look at that copse," Chris told the surveyors. "Can you spare the time to take us there?"

They both assured the astronaut that their time was entirely at his disposal. The Bailiff had released them from their ordinary duties for as long as Mr. Godfrey needed them. Yes, they would like to take the little party to the copse right away.

"Very well. Lead on," Chris said cheerfully. It was going to be very exciting trying to find the place where the "Angels" entered and left their underground hall.

It was quite a climb up from the entrance of the Hospital. Trees and gorse covered much of the hill under which it had been built. Tony tried to estimate how far below the surface the tunnels were, but he could only guess. They had been well protected, he imagined, from anything that could have been dropped on them during the War.

"There's the copse," Scargill called, pointing ahead.

A hundred yards away was a collection of about a hundred trees. They were fairly close together and their bases were covered by a tangled mass of brambles.

"Doesn't look as if many people wander inside here," Tony remarked as they got nearer.

It looked a dour place, not at all the spot where one would take a picnic. They approached it, their senses alert.

"There might be a way in round here," Mr. Scargill told them, "but be prepared for thorns and spikes."

"How about you, Sue?" Morrey asked. "Would you like to wait here?"

"Not on your life," the girl replied stoutly. "These are only old slacks I have on, so a tear or two won't matter."

"Very well," said Chris. "Lead on, Mr. Scargill."

The surveyor swung away round the copse. He paused at a particular place where the undergrowth seemed thinner.

"I think we could get in here," he told the others.

Behind Mr. Scargill came Chris, then Tony and Serge. Sue walked in front of Morrey, while Mr. Debris brought up the rear.

Progress was slow and difficult. At each step they had to pull aside brambles that scratched their hands and tore into their clothes. Several times Sue stumbled and would have fallen, but the strong arm of Morrey was ever present. Suddenly Mr. Scargill halted and drew a sharp breath.

"There it is!" he exclaimed. The others struggled to join him.

In front of them was a perfectly circular hole about two metres in diameter. There was no sign that the earth had been disturbed, and even from a distance of ten feet away they could see that the walls were sheer and polished. Without doubt this strange shaft led down to the underground hall. It was within a few feet of where the surveyors had estimated it would be, and its nature was such that only the "Angels" could have made it.

They crept closer, until they could peer over the edge. It was then that something that had been puzzling several of them became clear. Four feet below the surface the shaft was sealed with what appeared to be a dark-coloured plate. It must have been this that prevented light from the outside world filtering down into the underground hall.

"That's the entrance and exit, then," breathed Chris. "That's the way the 'Angels' come and go."

They looked around the copse. Maybe one tree had been removed from where the entrance had been made, but otherwise not a leaf seemed to have been disturbed. Above the shaft a slight gap in the foliage was all that indicated how the Visitors had got in. But their exact means of travel, or how the hatch over the shaft could be opened, were completely unknown.

For some time the men and the girl gazed at the extraordinary piece of work. Each was struck with wonder and some trepidation at thoughts of the Beings who had been responsible. Yet it was with some reluctance that they, at last, tore themselves away from this fascinating evidence of the "Angels' " visits.

"Great Scott! I nearly forgot," Mr. Debris exclaimed just as they were about to force their way out of the copse. "I've got a camera. Would you like me to take some photographs?"

"That's great!" Chris exclaimed. "I was just thinking that we'd have to come back to get some pictures of this shaft. If you could get a few shots I'd be more than grateful."

"It won't be easy," the surveyor said, looking around him. "The light isn't any too good, but I'll do my best."

It was a suitably impressed party that climbed back down the hillside and walked to the car park.

Chris spent most of that afternoon recording a full report for Sir Billy. At his request Mr. Debris and Mr. Scargill were rushing through plans of the underground hall and the approach tunnel, together with prints of the photographs. They were all to be sent to the Hotel Le Saumarez by five o'clock.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Tony as they met for dinner.

"I've decided to take a quick trip to see the Chief," Chris replied. "I'll have to take these plans and photographs with me, and I'd like to discuss our next move with him."

"What would you like us to do while you're away?" enquired Morrey.

"Keep a lookout for U.F.Os," smiled Chris. "But don't get visiting the 'Angels' till I get back."

Later that evening a small plane took Chris across the water to Jersey. There another larger aircraft was waiting to rush him to London Airport. A U.N.E.X.A. jet was standing by on Runway Seven to shoot him across the Atlantic. Then at Kennedy Airport, New York, a helicopter whisked him to the roof landing pad of the U.N.O. Building. Seven hours after leaving the Hotel Le Saumarez in Guernsey, the Deputy Director was knocking on his Chief's door.

Eight

Sir Billy Gillanders twirled a pencil angrily between his fingers. He couldn't get over that man Whittle. The General seemed to have a one-track mind and to think that everything should be subservient to the military. If Chris did report contact with Beings from Space, couldn't the General wait to see how they reacted with Humans? Why must he assume they would be hostile? His philosophy seemed to be—"Anything strange, kill it!"

But surely even Whittle couldn't contemplate anything so outrageous on Guernsey! To take drastic action could endanger the lives of the inhabitants themselves. Sir Billy dropped his pencil as a horrible thought struck him. He recalled that the General had requested him to order Chris and the others home immediately they reported the presence of Visitors on the Island. When he had declined to do any such thing, Whittle had said that the Director must accept responsibility!

Responsibility for what? If Chris reported U.F.Os landing and bringing Visitors, he would want his Deputy to stay on and find out something about them. Why should he withdraw his men when the most vital part of their task was about to begin? What did Whittle plan to do?

Sir Billy was confident that neither the Security Council nor the General Assembly would authorise hostile action against any Emissaries from Space unless and until they were proved to be harmful. Surely even General Whittle would never use his forces without authority? To do so would be utterly illegal. But would that stop him?

Sir Billy decided he must have a private word with the Secretary General. Surely the Chief Officer of the United Nations Organisation would be able to restrain its Commander-in-Chief from taking any precipitate or unauthorised action.

When the phone rang and the Director found his Deputy on the other end of the line, he was delighted. Chris said that he wanted to come to New York as a matter of urgency, and Sir Billy promised to get everything laid on.

"I have something very interesting to report," Chris told his Chief, "and it can't wait."

The Director managed to get a few hours' sleep in a little room adjoining his office, which he sometimes used when he was pressed for time. He wondered what his Deputy had to report that was of such importance.

Sir Billy awoke early. He rang the canteen to order a light breakfast and then cleared his desk of the pile of papers on one side of it. He resisted the temptation to start work on them, for he wanted to concentrate on Chris's report as soon as he arrived. Twenty-three minutes later a knock sounded on his door, and the Director bounded up to open it.

"Chris!" he burst out, seizing his Deputy's hand and holding it for a few seconds. There was more than professional friendship between them.

"Well, what have you come up with?" Sir Billy asked when they were seated. Chris placed his brief-case on his Chief's desk.

"Quite a lot," he replied. "Here"—he felt in his case and drew out the plans drawn by the surveyors—"is the plan of the hall and that part of the tunnel finished by the Visitors."

Sir Billy stood up and bent over the desk. He looked at the drawings intently.

"That is the cross-sectional plan," Chris told him, pointing to one of the sheets. He waited for his Chief to absorb the drawings in front of him. Then he put his hand in the case again and drew out some photographs.

"This," he said, taking up one of them, "is an enlargement of a snapshot of the entrance to the underground hall."

The Director picked it up with a quiet whistle. He looked at it for a long time, then picked up the others. He turned to Chris.

"Pretty conclusive, you think?" he asked.

"I'd say so," the younger man replied. Then he gave Sir Billy a full verbal report on all they had discovered in the underground hall and in the copse which concealed its entrance.

He speculated on the nature of the seal over the entrance, and wondered whether he should have taken a closer look at it.

"I think you have done very well," the Director said. "Now do you think you could get all your report down on tape? I'll order some coffee meanwhile."

When Chris had recorded everything he knew and described everything he had found, he sat back. Then his Chief called for a secretary to take away the recording so that it could be transcribed. When the girl had gone Chris turned to Sir Billy. They must have a talk together; that was the main reason for his journey.

"Billy," he said earnestly, now that the two of them were alone, "what's going to happen when the 'Angels' return? What shall we do?"

"Whew!" breathed the Director. "That's the thousand-dollar question. Obviously we have to contact them. And that's going to take a bit of courage."

"And a great deal of care," Chris added.

"True. This has got to be a gentle process so that we can show that we want to be friendly."

Having said that the Director suddenly thought of General Whittle.

"We have a problem here," he went on. "The C-in-C is convinced that, if we do get Visitors from Space, they will undoubtedly be hostile. He is all for destroying them as soon as they appear. This is a disaster that we must avoid at all costs."

"But surely he wouldn't be allowed to do anything so diabolical," gasped Chris.

"I'm sure he won't. But with a man like Whittle you can never tell. He seems to have an obsession against the Visitors," the Director sighed. "Rest assured that I shall do all in my power to prevent any precipitate action."

"Have you thought of how we shall actually approach the 'Angels'?" asked Chris.

"You think of them as 'Angels'?" smiled Sir Billy. "Presumably based on the report of Miss Howard."

"Well, she is the only human who has ever seen them. The rest of her story has been proved accurate, so she's probably right about the Visitors."

Sir Billy nodded.

"Probably," he agreed, "and there's another important fact that we mustn't overlook. Miss Howard wasn't harmed by the Visitors. When she lost consciousness she was returned safely to the surface. Which leads me to believe that these Beings are not hostile."

The two men were silent for a time. Then both began to speak at once. Smilingly Chris deferred to his Chief.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Sir Billy asked.

"I expect so," the Deputy laughed. "Sue?"

"Well, yes. I was thinking about Miss Howard," Sir Billy admitted. "I was wondering if we could ask her—"

"—to meet the 'Angels' again?" concluded Chris, and the Director nodded with relief.

"Yes, that's it. You see, she has already seen them, and they have seen her. She would be the best person to make contact with them again. If she could communicate with them she could prepare the way for you to meet them. Will you ask her if she'll do it? Don't press her, of course."

"I'll ask her," Chris promised, "and I'm quite sure she'll agree. Now, assuming she does meet them and they can communicate, what message shall she give them?"

"The first words she should say would be to let them know that we want to be friendly and we hope that they do, too. Then she must ask if they will let you talk to them. We'll see what happens then before we plan the next move, but it will be largely in your hands, Chris," Sir Billy said.

"And what if they don't understand our language?"

"Then Miss Howard must convey to them by signs and expressions that we are friendly. Once we have met them I'm sure we can devise a method of talking to each other."

"Right. Well, the sooner they come now, the better," Chris said. "I take it you will circulate my report and have copies made of the photographs?"

"Of course. They will go to a very restricted list of people, as did your first report. All I'm worried about is whether that madman Whittle will do anything foolish."

"Does he have to have a copy?"

"As C-in-C I'm afraid he does. Still—I'm warning the Secretary General that we may have trouble with him," Sir Billy sighed.

Late that afternoon Chris began his flight back to Guernsey, and round about the same time a folder was placed on General Whittle's desk. It contained a copy of the report and the photographs. The General pulled it towards him and opened it.

Ah! This was what he had been waiting for. He read through the typewritten sheets carefully, then studied the photographs of the entrance in the copse. He rose, walked over to a filing cabinet, and drew out from it a large-scale map of Guernsey. He placed it on his desk and bent over it.

Yes, there would be the copse over the Hall. Somewhere within it would be the circular shaft that the photos recorded. General Whittle pressed a bell on his desk.

A big man in uniform entered the room. He was Major Smith, the General's closest aide, and he had the General's complete confidence. He knew precisely how his Chief regarded the intrusion of Aliens from Space, and he was with him a hundred per cent. The Major was an expert on ballistic missiles and his great regret was that it seemed unlikely that any of his "babes" would be used seriously. Now, with the possibility of Invaders from Space, he'd be able to demonstrate the incredible accuracy that could be achieved by the very latest model.

"I think we have all we need, Harold," the General said, pushing the folder over to the big man. "Read that through and study the pictures. Then let me know what you think."

There was no formality between these two when they were alone. If other people had been present it would have been very different. Protocol would have been observed most strictly, and there would have been an abundance of "sirs" and stiff salutes. Now the Major settled easily into an armchair and opened the folder. He studied the report and the photographs intently. Then he turned to the General.

"I think a Mark IX would do it," he said. "Presumably you'd like me to put one right down that hole?"

"Can you do it, Harold? That's the thing," Whittle said.

"A piece of cake," the Major boasted. "Give me an accurate fix on that hole and I'll put a Mark IX right down the middle."

"Cut the gaff, Harold," Whittle grinned. "What degree of accuracy have you reached with this latest?"

"Almost smack on," Smith assured him. "Over a range of, say, two hundred miles an accuracy of plus or minus twelve inches."

"As close as that? I didn't realise you boys were so good. So—if you used a mobile launcher from, say, somewhere on the south coast of England, you could 'hole in one'?"

"Sure thing. Get me some good aerial photographs so that I can pinpoint the target, and I'll wager my neck that I can do it."

"Satellite or aircraft?"

"Both. Satellite photographs would give an overall view and help me locate that copse. Aerial photos would position the entrance within the copse exactly," Major Smith answered.

"Wouldn't the trees obscure the hole?"

"I doubt it. In any case we can use an infra-red scanner, so they wouldn't be any real problem. When's the job to be done?"

"As soon as possible after confirmation that the Invaders have landed," the General declared, thumping his desk. "So, Harold, I'd like you to get this mobile launcher into position right away."

"Do I go through the usual channels to get a site?"

"Not on your life. There are too many people soft about this idea of the Aliens. They think we ought to bow and scrape to them, or that we ought to put down a red carpet for them."

"So it's top secret?"

"Topper than top," the general said, his face flushing. "Harold, if some of those old women on the Security Council get to know about this, they'll try and stop me. It will be too late for them to say I was right once the Aliens have taken over."

The two men exchanged a long, hard look. They understood each other perfectly.

"I—er—think we're due for a practice exercise," Smith grinned. "We'll be launching a dummy missile from somewhere along the south coast of England. But only you and I will know that the missile won't be a dummy at all."

"Will you work out and set the co-ordinates yourself, Harold?"

The two men talked together for some time, the General undertaking to get the aerial photographs that the Major needed. Then Whittle called in another aide and gave him a string of orders, setting in motion arrangements for a practice launch. While he was doing this Major Smith saluted smartly, clicked his heels, and marched out of the General's office.

Nine

The *Ferret* was an appropriate name for the newspaper. Its proprietors and Editor prided themselves that no piece of news escaped their attention, that no happening eluded their reporters. To find out what they wanted, the reporters went to any lengths and were empowered to use unlimited funds. The most ruthless of all the *Ferret*'s newshounds was Derek Hayes, a bearded man in his middle thirties. Hayes had a fearsome reputation in Fleet Street, and many questioned his methods of obtaining "copy". It was Derek that the Editor sent on a very special assignment.

"There's something peculiar going on in Guernsey," the Editor said. "I don't believe in U.F.Os myself, but many of our readers do. I've heard"—tapping a sheet of paper on his desk "that a well-known team of astronauts is on the Island investigating some very persistent reports of sightings. Find out what's happening. I want an exclusive report, and I don't care how you get it."

Derek grinned. This was just the kind of job he liked.

"Funds?" he asked.

"Unlimited," his Editor said. "Now get moving."

"I wonder how long we shall have to wait?" Sue asked as they walked towards the old German Fort.

"Not grumbling, are you?" Morrey laughed, slipping his arm in the girl's. "Do you want to go back to your old job?"

"Oh, I'm not complaining," Sue assured him. "But I was just speculating when we might see the U.F.Os."

"Sue, I want to talk to you," Chris said. They had spread an old raincoat before sitting, for the rain earlier in the day had made their favourite seat a little damp. The girl looked anxiously at the Deputy Director.

"You want to talk to me, Chris? What have I done?"

"Nothing wrong, Sue," Chris assured her hastily, "but my Chief and I were talking about you when I went over to see him."

"Oh? And what about, pray?" the girl asked.

"Sue, my Chief and I have a request to make," Chris told her. Then he paused, wondering how he should ask her if she would be the first to meet the "Angels".

"Well, what is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"It's this, Sue. Will you meet the 'Angels' again?" Chris asked, looking at the girl intently. Suppose she should refuse?

"Meet the 'Angels' again? You mean you want me to go with you when you go to see them?"

"Er—not exactly. We want you to go in alone and meet them."

"Go in alone? You're not serious?"

"Perfectly serious, Sue. My Chief thinks that as the 'Angels' have already seen you and done you no harm, they won't hurt you when you visit them again. Of course, if you'd rather not—"

"I—I didn't say that," the girl said faintly. "But—"

"I know," the astronaut answered, laying his hand on Sue's shoulder. "It's a great thing to ask anyone, but we want to approach the 'Angels' gently and carefully. A great deal depends on how we do it. The fact that you, a girl, would be meeting them for a second time, will surely show them that we mean them no harm."

Obviously Sue didn't know what to say, so Chris went on.

"I know it's a gamble that the 'Angels' are not hostile, but it's a pretty safe one. You said yourself, Sue, that they exuded an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, that the blue aura drove away any fear that you had. And you said that they looked kind and peaceful—like angels, you said."

"I know. They did look like pictures of angels, and I didn't feel afraid."

"Why did you pass out?" Morrey asked quietly. "Do you think you would again?"

"Of course not. Probably it was the tremendous shock of seeing these Beings," Sue replied thoughtfully. "Certainly it wasn't fear."

"No, I don't think it was. If I'd thought you were scared to that extent I would never have asked you," Chris assured her earnestly.

"Very well, then, I'll go," the girl said with a determined toss of her head. "But what shall I do and say?"

"The Chief and I agree that it's most important to let them know that they are welcome, and that we should like to establish communication with them. We want you to ask them if I can speak to them."

"But what if they don't speak our language? They may not communicate by speech at all."

"True, but I think they will. If they don't, just smile at them, Sue, and make them know we are friendly."

"All right," sighed the girl, "I'll do my best. But you'll be close behind me in the tunnel, won't you?"

One of the prettiest places in England is Lulworth Cove. It is a sandy paradise on the south coast, about half-way between Swanage and Weymouth. Every year it is visited by thousands of people, so that it tends to become overcrowded and to lose some of its appeal. But when the crowds have gone and their litter is cleared away, the Cove regains its beauty and is there for the enjoyment of the occasional visitor.

No more than two miles to the west of Lulworth Cove is an area of rolling countryside called Chaldon Down. For many years it had been the centre of heated controversy, for at certain times this typically English beauty spot was taken over by the Military. Now, so many years after the Second World War, a growing number of people—including most of the local inhabitants—felt that such a desecration was no longer necessary.

"Here they are again," one worthy announced, bursting into the bar of the "Hen and Chickens".

All the customers knew what he meant. The Military had moved in again. Even as the customers carried their drinks to the window, a convoy of lorries roared past. Then came the staff cars, a big trailer-caravan, and finally the great transporter carrying something shrouded with waterproof sheets.

"That's a rocket, that is," one old man said knowingly. "I remember seeing 'em—"

"Oh, shut up, Grandad," one young man burst out testily. "What do they want to bring a rocket down this end of the country for? We're not going to have a war, are we?"

Mr. Jones, the publican, was polishing his glasses vigorously. Secretly he didn't mind the Military coming. It meant that his pub was in for a very busy time and, after all, it did liven things up a bit to have scores of smart young men about the place.

"I expect they're going to have another of those practice launchings," he said. "It's been nearly a year since they let the last one off."

"Yes, and it cracked half a dozen panes in my greenhouse," a red-faced man declared indignantly.

"But you were well paid for it, Amos," the publican reminded his customer with a grin.

The U.N.O. soldiers set about their task with practised efficiency. Before nightfall the mobile launcher was set up, and the huge caravan that housed the control equipment was in position on a hillock half a mile away. Behind this a small town-ship of tents had sprung up, and over the night air came the throb of electric generators.

Men moved quietly and swiftly about their tasks. It was as if the country were under a real threat, and this were to be a real launching instead of a practice one. The men all prided themselves that they were just as speedy as if war was imminent.

The missile itself was still covered, as it had been on its journey to Chaldon Down. These covers would be removed only minutes before the firing took place.

"Gee! This has been a slick job," an American sergeant, with the U.N.O. flash on his arm, said to a British counterpart. "We were only activated yesterday."

"So were we," the British sergeant grinned. "I guess the C-in-C can move like greased lightning when he wants to. Anyone would think it was the real thing."

By the time Major Smith arrived in the U.N.O. helicopter all was ready for a launch. Only the missile itself remained shrouded. And only the Major himself knew that under those covers lay a real Mark IX, the deadliest and most accurate missile yet produced, and not a dummy.

The aerial photographs were clear and detailed. Studying them the big Major smiled to himself. Here for the first time would be an opportunity to demonstrate his wonderful new pet and his own prowess as a missile expert. A corporal constantly manned the radio link with the C-in-C's office in New York. A word from General Whittle, and the Mark IX could be on its way within an hour.

"Tell me more about satellites," Sue said, anxious to show her interest in the wonderful world of Space.

"Well, there are dozens of kinds," smiled Morrey, "doing all sort of jobs. Some are in a high orbit, others just beyond the atmosphere. Quite a number are in what is called a geostationary orbit. That means that they are at a height that enables them to circle the Earth at exactly the same speed as the Earth rotates. Which means that they remain constantly over the same spot of Earth's surface."

"What are they used for?" the girl asked.

"The geo-stationary ones are used mainly for communications. They allow radio signals to be bounced back to Earth over greater distances. This enables television pictures to be flashed all round the world. Normally the range of television transmission is limited by the curvature of the Earth, for the receiver and transmitter must be 'in sight' of each other."

"But that is only one of the uses of artificial satellites," Serge put in, anxious to get the girl's attention. "They are used for photography, map-making, weather forecasting, hurricane tracking, crop and forest surveillance, and a hundred other jobs."

"Including locating mineral deposits and fish shoals, broadcasting educational programmes over vast areas, and acting as fixed points for the accurate navigation of ships and aircraft," Chris added. "You see, Sue, they are very useful pieces of equipment."

"How many did you say there are in orbit now?" she asked.

"Oh, over a thousand," Chris told her, "and each one is tracked and each orbit recorded. If we watch for a few minutes we'll probably be able to pick out one or two as they move against the star background."

"Let's see how many we can spot," suggested Morrey. "We'll each cover a different quarter of the sky."

So the three young men and the girl sat down, each facing a different direction, and each studying intently the heavens above them.

Chris was the first to identify a satellite, which he pointed out to the others. A few moments later Morrey saw one. It was another ten minutes before Serge saw his first, which left Sue rather disgruntled.

"Aren't there any satellites in my corner of the sky?" she asked in disgust.

"You look long enough, my girl, and you're bound to see one," Morrey assured her.

But now a bank of cloud had moved across the sky, so the watchers couldn't see a single star.

"Shall we go back?" asked Chris.

"Not yet," Sue protested quickly. "I want to see my satellite. I'm sure the clouds will blow away soon."

"Very well. I'll give you another ten minutes exactly. Then I shall march you back to Le Saumarez," Chris said with mock sternness.

The time allowed by the Deputy had almost passed when the cloud cover broke and the stars shone with their usual brilliance. The four satellite-spotters resumed their task.

"Just another half minute," Chris reminded them.

Sue was determined to pick out a satellite if she could. She peered with concentration into her quarter of the sky.

"Time's up," Chris announced, getting to his feet, and at that instant Sue gave a shout.

"I've got one," she called excitedly. "It's super!"

The others turned towards where the girl was pointing.

Their three sharp intakes of breath sounded as one, for the object that Sue had seen was no satellite. It was brighter and moving more swiftly than any of the other satellites that they had seen previously. Even as they watched, the moving light did something no satellite could do. It suddenly changed direction!

"It's a U.F.O.," Morrey gasped. Serge and Chris were too shaken to speak. Sue put her hands to her mouth in consternation, as if it were her fault that this mysterious body had appeared. Then, while the hearts of the four young people were racing with excitement and their thoughts a jumble, clouds blew over the sky again and the spectacle was gone.

"It was a U.F.O., wasn't it?" whispered the girl. The others left it to Chris to reply.

"I'm almost certain it was, Sue," he said soberly. "'I've certainly never seen anything like it before. No satellite can do what that thing did. Nor could any known plane or spacecraft. Yes—I think we've had our first sighting of our Visitors."

"Do you think they have gone to the Hospital?" asked Serge. "It looked as if the U.F.O. was at a fair height."

"Well, the object we saw didn't come below the clouds," Morrey pointed out. "I would have thought that, even though the Hospital is some miles away, we'd have seen the U.F.O. descend if it had made for that copse."

"Let's get back to the Hotel," Chris said. "Maybe other people saw it. If so, the police will be letting us know."

The four walked briskly towards Le Saumarez. Even though the clouds were thickening they couldn't avoid raising their eyes to see if there was another sign of the extra-terrestrial Visitor.

Their thoughts were varied. Sue was scared but excited. If "Angels" were coming to visit the Earth again, she would be the first to see and meet them. Possibly even to speak to them. Her three companions were thinking about the tremendous event it would be in human history. If, indeed, contact was made with highly intelligent Beings from another World then our whole theology and philosophy would be changed. And this could well take place within a few hours.

They didn't talk much on that memorable walk back to the Hotel. Tony would be very disappointed that he'd missed seeing the U.F.O. Yet he would have the consolation of knowing that his friends had made a sighting that could herald a new visit by the "Angels"—and he'd be very much involved in that.

But wasn't that Tony dancing about outside the Hotel? It was, and the youngest of the astronauts saw his friends and came racing towards them.

"Chris! Morrey! Serge! Sue!" he called. "There's been a sighting!"

"I know," Chris replied, seizing Tony's arm, "we've seen it ourselves."

Ten

Tony swallowed hard.

"Come inside," he said at last, "and I'll give you the reports I've had."

It was a solemn little party that made its way back into the

Hotel. An observant Carla saw at once that something had happened. She ushered them into her private lounge.

"I'll send you some coffee in shortly," she said as she left her guests alone.

"Now, Tony let's have it," Chris said as soon as the door closed.

"Well, all was quiet until ten minutes ago. Then the Chief Superintendent rang up. I took the call and he said that reports were starting to come in of a strange light in the sky. Two of his men on patrol had also seen it and had radioed a report back."

"What did the reports say?" asked Chris.

"Oh, just that this light had been seen moving across the sky, and that it had altered course quite suddenly. The two policemen insisted that it wasn't a conventional aircraft."

"That's just what we saw," Morrey declared. "Then the clouds covered the sky. I wonder if there will be reports of any further sightings tonight."

"Depends on the weather," Serge reminded him. "When we came in the clouds seemed very thick. I doubt whether they will clear away for the rest of the night."

"Are you going to report this to the Chief?" asked Tony.

"There isn't much to report yet, but I suppose I'd better let him know that we believe we've had a sighting. Maybe we'll have better luck tomorrow. Maybe a U.F.O. will land," Chris replied.

"Then what?" Tony asked.

"We'll visit the Hospital," the young Deputy answered solemnly. "Meanwhile I'd better have a word with Sir Billy."

It was only by chance that Peter was able to take in the extra guest at Le Saumarez. A late cancellation had left one room vacant, so Derek Hayes booked in and carried his bag to his room.

"So this is where the four astronauts are staying, is it?" he murmured to himself. The information he'd received was confirmed by a quick glance at the Hotel register. Yes, the names were there all right, but it seemed that his quarries were not in the Hotel. He settled himself down in the lounge with a magazine to await their return.

The Director of U.N.E.X.A. was still in his office when the call from his Deputy came through.

"We've had a sighting," Chris burst out, and proceeded to give Sir Billy an account of what he had seen, and of the reports of the Islanders, as told to him by the police.

"So you really think it was a U.F.O.?" the Director asked. "Oh, I don't question your judgement, Chris, but you know how many mistakes have been made in the past."

"I'd stake my life on it, Billy," the Deputy said earnestly. "Unfortunately there's too much cloud for there to be a chance to see it again tonight. We're going to look out for it tomorrow, so stand by for another call if we see anything."

"What will you do if it seems to land?"

"I'm going to warn the Manager of the Underground Hospital that he'll have to let us in if a U.F.O. appears to touch down in that copse where the entrance is."

"Have you any idea what this U.F.O. looked like?"

"Unfortunately—no. It appeared just as a moving point of light. I didn't get any impression of its size or shape. However, I'm taking some binoculars and a camera whenever we go out again."

"Good luck, Chris. And be careful," Sir Billy urged as they ended the call.

On another floor of the U.N.O. building General Whittle, too, was taking a phone call. His caller was the big Major, who was reporting on the progress of establishing the launching site. The outcome of his report was that the Mark IX could be launched within an hour of receiving the order from the General.

"Got everything worked out yet, Harold?" asked Whittle. "Have you got the exact range?"

"Yes, I've worked it out to within a few centimetres. That switch we did in exchanging the practice missile for the real Mark IX was real slick. None of these chaps here suspect that it won't be just another routine practice shot. Sure you've got the political angle tied up, Ed? There'll be a good few casualties at the receiving end."

"Let me worry about that, Harold. Your job is to launch your missile as soon as possible after I give the order. That clear?"

"Yes—sir." The salute almost came over the phone.

Next morning Chris received a number of typewritten sheets from the Bailiff's office. Sir Arnold had instructed the police typists to get down on paper every report they had had about the U.F.O. It turned out that there were some twenty in all, many of them adding little to what Chris himself already knew.

"It's a pity people can't be more accurate," he sighed. "Only two give a time for the sighting, and only one gives a compass bearing."

"We didn't do very much better ourselves, did we?" Morrey laughed. "I'll see we take a compass, a stop watch and binoculars with us tonight."

During the day the astronauts and Sue called on Sir Arnold Williams and gave him an account of their own experience. The Bailiff listened intently.

"So you think that another visit by these Beings from Space is imminent?" he asked. "What, then, are your plans?"

"I've been over to see my Chief, and as a result we have asked Miss Howard if she will volunteer to be the first to meet these Visitors," Chris replied. When the Bailiff looked surprised he hurried on.

"We're doing this because Miss Howard has already met them, though briefly. They did her no harm when they saw her. We want to let them know that we meet them in friendship and would like to communicate with them."

"But are you sure it will be all right?" Sir Arnold asked uneasily. "You seem pretty certain these Beings are benevolent."

"Oh, I'm sure they are," Sue burst out. "They had lovely faces. I'm certain that no one who looked so like angels could be wicked."

The Bailiff smiled at the girl.

"That's a piece of woman's logic if ever I heard one," he said. "Still—I admire your courage, Miss Howard."

"Oh, I don't mind," Sue assured him confidently. "I wasn't a bit afraid of them before."

"Sue will ask them—assuming communication is possible—to allow me to meet them," Chris went on, "and once I can do so we'll try and find out why they are visiting us, what their intentions are, and how we can establish permanent contact."

"You'll have quite a job on," Sir Arnold pointed out. "And will your companions meet the Visitors, too?"

"Let him try and keep us away," said Tony indignantly. "We all want to meet them."

"Yes, but we don't want a whole band of us to descend on them at once," Chris urged. "Rest assured one of my first requests will be for you others to come and join Sue and me."

"If you feel that a civic welcome would help, I'll get that laid on," the Bailiff said hopefully.

"I don't suppose that will be necessary, sir," Chris answered with a twinkle. "But we'll certainly see how they react to the presence of humans."

"Er—will you be taking any weapons with you when you meet the Visitors?" asked Sir Arnold.

"Certainly not," declared Chris. "The whole object of our contact will be to let them know that we come in peace. Besides—if they have the ability to cross Space, I doubt whether our puny weapons would compare with any they might have."

"I quite agree," the Bailiff nodded. "I just didn't want you to be unprepared if it does so happen that they are hostile."

"We'll risk it, won't we?" Chris asked, turning to his companions. They all nodded.

"Do you think your Visitors are likely to arrive in day-time," Sir Arnold asked, "or is it certain they will come during darkness?"

"Nothing is certain," Chris told him. "All we have to go on is that all the reports we have studied refer to night sightings."

"But wouldn't you think that quite usual?" Serge asked. "As they emit light, perhaps the U.F.Os are simply more visible at night. They wouldn't be nearly so noticeable in daylight."

"I don't agree," declared Morrey. "I think one would be more visible in daylight. Its unusual shape would show that it wasn't a plane."

"All right," Chris smiled. "We won't fall out about it. Perhaps it would be better if we are prepared to meet the Visitors day or night. Can we arrange that a constant watch be mounted?"

The Bailiff thought there would be no difficulty. He'd request the Chief of Police to brief his men to keep a special look out for possible U.F.Os, particularly in the neighbourhood of the Underground Hospital. Their instructions would be to do nothing but observe and report.

"What about getting into the Underground Hospital?" asked Tony. "Suppose we want to see if the Visitors have come and find it closed?"

"Mr. Desmoulins hasn't many people on his staff," Sir Arnold said thoughtfully. "But I'll have a talk with him. I'll ask him to make himself available to you at any hour, day or night."

"Mr. Carter, his engineer, could deputise for him," Chris suggested. "We don't want to ruin the poor man's life altogether."

They left the Bailiff's office shortly afterwards, but before they did so Sir Arnold extracted a promise from them that they would inform him immediately if there were any developments.

"I don't care if it's three o'clock in the morning," he smiled as he shook hands with all five of them. "And don't forget—if it's possible I'd like to meet these Visitors to our Island."

General Whittle paced his office in some excitement. He'd received his copy of the report Chris had made to the Director. So it seemed as if things were moving. If a U.F.O. had indeed been sighted, it wouldn't be long before the Aliens might return to the Underground Hospital. Then—and here the General rubbed his hands in anticipation—they wouldn't know what hit them!

"Get me Major Smith at Chaldon Down in the U.K.," he barked over his phone to an operator. He must keep Harold posted with the latest developments. As he waited for the call to come through the General tried to control his mounting excitement. He felt in his bones that the time for action was rapidly approaching, that soon he would be able to attack the Aliens before they had established themselves. Whilst his heroes, Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett, had had a defensive role to play, Edward Whittle would take the offensive. History would record that it was he who, in spite of opposition from spineless politicians, had saved the World from extra-terrestrial invasion!

By the time the little party had reached the Underground Hospital the Manager had already had a phone call from the Bailiff. Both Mr. Desmoulins and his engineer were awaiting them. They were a little tense, for it seemed that Sir Arnold had warned them that a visit from the Beings from Space could be expected at any moment.

"I think we might have to close the Hospital to visitors," Chris answered in reply to the Manager's query if there was anything he could do to help. "I've been thinking. It might be very awkward to have scores of the public milling about when the U.F.O. lands. Can you close down without causing alarm?"

"Certainly," Mr. Desmoulins affirmed. "We do it from time to time if any repairs are being carried out, or if the Hospital is to be ventilated."

"Ventilated? What do you mean?"

"Every so often we put some huge air blowers in this entrance. We unseal one of the escape shafts at the far end, and we give the whole underground complex a good airing."

"Very well. Then can you arrange to close down as soon as possible? We don't know how soon our Visitors from Space will be dropping in on us," said the Deputy Director.

"Well—er—can you tell us what's going to happen when they arrive?" Mr. Carter asked anxiously.

Chris thought for a moment, and then spoke his thoughts aloud.

"I anticipate we shall get reports of a U.F.O. touching down in the copse. Or we might see it for ourselves," he said. "We shall immediately phone you, and then we shall get to your Hospital as quickly as we can. We shall enter with some caution and make our way towards the former 'unfinished tunnel'. Miss Howard here, will pay a call on the Visitors, and then we must play it by ear."

"Are they likely to come out of the Hospital?" Mr. Desmoulins asked a little shakily.

"I just don't know," Chris confessed. "If their purpose is to meet members of the human race, then obviously they must."

"I admire your courage, Miss Howard," the Hospital Manager said.

"Rubbish. What I remember of them, they were very nice. I don't suppose I shall be the least bit afraid," the girl declared. She hoped she was right.

Back at Le Saumarez Chris thought it best to put Peter and Carla in the picture, and they were both very impressed.

"I hope you won't mind if we go rushing in and out of your hotel at any time," Chris said. "Your phone will be a great help."

A new visitor—a bearded man in his middle thirties—came into the lounge just then. Chris hoped he hadn't overheard much of his conversation with the Hamperls. The visitor seated himself in an armchair with the local newspaper, but over the top of it he watched the astronauts with close interest.

Mr. Hayes had certainly heard enough to tell him that something was expected to happen fairly soon. This girl who was with the astronauts seemed to be very much involved with whatever it was that they were doing. But how did she fit into the picture? Could he make her acquaintance and perhaps find out from her what was going on? He didn't expect the astronauts themselves would be willing to tell him anything—particularly if they knew he was a newspaper reporter. The girl would probably be a much softer touch than any of the four men.

As soon as the five had left the lounge to take their meal in the dining-room, Hayes slid out of his chair and went to the hotel desk. There was no one about as he looked quickly through the hotel register. Ah, that must be it. He made a note of Sue's name and home address. Then he went out of the hotel to a public call box and put through a call to his Editor. He wanted to know as much as possible about a Miss Susan Howard.

Eleven

The Visitors came that night.

It was shortly after midnight when they saw the U.F.O. Serge had stayed in the Hotel, while the others had taken up their vantage point on top of the German Fort. A cool wind blew from the sea. Sue shivered slightly and pulled her coat more closely about her. The flashing of the navigation lights broke the gloom at regular intervals.

Chris had been watching the satellite for several seconds when he let out a gasp and hurriedly grabbed for the binoculars that hung at his side. The "satellite" had reversed its direction and was accelerating!

"What is it, Chris?" cried Sue.

She followed the direction of his binoculars, as did Tony and Morrey. The moving light was getting larger. It was coming nearer!

"It's—it's them!" cried Tony. "It's a U.F.O., isn't it, Chris?"

The Deputy Director didn't reply. He was watching the moving shape too intently. Shape? Perhaps that wasn't the right description of it, for the object of his attention seemed to have no settled shape. One moment it would be almost spherical, the next it would be more elongated, the next it would be an irregular blob. The light it gave out was bright—golden, he thought. He could hardly tear the binoculars away from it.

Sue gave a sob, the others a sharp intake of breath. There was no doubt about it. The U.F.O. was descending. And it was not only getting lower, it was approaching the Hospital. They knew this because they had carefully plotted its exact direction from the Fort with the help of a large-scale map.

Even as they watched the strange light dipped even lower. Then, quite suddenly, it disappeared.

"What's happened? It's gone!" Tony blurted out. Chris kept looking carefully through his glasses.

"I don't think it has," he said slowly. "I fancy I can see a dark shape settling down over the Hospital. Maybe the light has been turned off for the landing."

"Perhaps it is part of their landing procedure," suggested Morrey. "Or maybe they don't want to advertise their exact point of touch down."

Chris lowered the binoculars.

"Well, this is it," he said. "It seems that our Visitors have come. If that was a U.F.O.—and I'm certain it was—it has landed near the Hospital and its passengers have arrived."

"What do we do now?" asked Sue in a strained voice.

"We go back to the Hotel," Chris decided at once. "No doubt Serge has already received many reports. We'd best see what they are."

On previous occasions they had always walked back to the Hotel in a leisurely way. Now they hurried as fast as they could, almost running in their anxiety to learn of the reports that Serge must be getting.

Their Russian friend was still glued to the phone when they got back. Peter and Carla, looking a little scared, indicated that Serge was still in their office.

"Has it happened?" Peter asked in little more than a whisper.

"I think so," Chris answered briefly as he followed the others to join Serge.

The Russian was scribbling furiously as he listened to the phone. He barely acknowledged the arrival of his friends. They, anxious not to interrupt, watched silently as Serge wrote on. At last he thanked his caller and hung up.

"Whew!" he breathed, and they saw that his usually sallow face was flushed with excitement.

"You've seen it too?" he asked.

They all nodded.

"Yes, we've seen the U.F.O.," Chris told him. "Now what about your reports?"

Serge glanced at his notes.

"I don't know whether you can read these," he apologised. "I'm afraid I'm not very legible when I'm writing fast. Perhaps I'd better try and read them back to you."

The others listened intently as Serge began to read. It was a police officer who had phoned in. His first report was from some of his own men. Several patrols had radioed back that they were watching a strange light in the sky. The men reported its colour and changing shape. It was, it seemed, approaching the Hospital and then it vanished.

Other reports came from people who had been out late and whose attention had been caught by such an unusual sight. All the reports seemed to agree that the U.F.O. was descending towards the Underground Hospital before it disappeared. Nothing had been seen of it since.

"Well, here they are then," cried Tony, his face flushed with excitement. "Let's get off to the Hospital."

"Steady on," Chris cautioned. "Let's not rush things. If the Visitors have arrived, they won't be leaving in the next five minutes. At least—I don't expect they will. We'll let them settle in for a time and not go rushing in on them the moment they arrive."

"What do you propose then, Chris?" Morrey asked.

"That we try and get some sleep. Then at nine o'clock in the morning we visit the Hospital and Sue pays her call," he replied.

"If we're going to bed I'd better let the police know that we don't want any further reports tonight," Serge said. "That is, unless the Visitors take off again."

While the Russian was using the phone Chris told Peter and Carla what was happening.

"We're going to meet them after breakfast," he smiled.

"Then you shall have the breakfast of your lives," Carla promised.

The telephone call for Derek Hayes came through quite late in the evening. A local reporter in Sue's home town had been able to discover a great deal about her—her family, her job, her interests and much more. Hayes replaced the receiver thoughtfully. If he could get hold of this girl on her own, he was sure he could extract from her all the information possible.

Back in the bar the reporter joined another bearded man of about the same age. This was the local taxi driver, whom Hayes had met quite by chance. His name was George Louvet. It had been he who had driven Hayes from the airport. When, earlier that evening, George had brought another visitor from his plane, Hayes had recognised him and invited him to take a drink. George had no more calls that evening, so he joined the reporter and thanked him for his hospitality.

One of Derek Hayes' sources of success was his ability to get the confidence of strangers. By this means he had often gained interesting "copy". After the third drink he and George Louvet were chatting to each other like old friends. It was after Hayes had returned from taking his phone call from London that George confided to his new friend his great ambition.

His greatest desire in life was to own a smallholding. By dint of careful saving, he and his wife had been able to purchase a sizeable meadow. His next move would be to buy some cattle and start a small herd. Already he had his eye on a wonderful bull called Henry, but he was far too dear for George's pocket. The taxi driver sighed and, for the first time in the evening, looked depressed. So the seeds of an idea were sown in the ruthless mind of Derek Hayes.

Before he went to bed the reporter took a stroll as far as the sea front. There was no one about except a lone policeman. The reporter called a "goodnight" as he passed, but the officer seemed anxious to talk.

"Did you see it, sir?" he asked. Derek could see the man was sweating. "See what? No, I've seen nothing. What are you on about?"

"The U.F.O. Hundreds of people have seen it," the policeman said, obviously glad of someone to talk to. "It came over about an hour ago. Then it disappeared."

As he walked back to Le Saumarez the reporter was filled with excitement. Every instinct told him that something stupendous was going to happen. What it was he had no idea, but whatever it was, the readers of the *Ferret* would have a full account. It would be no use asking one of the astronauts. The girl was his best bet. Well—he'd find out all he wanted—even if he had to kidnap her to get the information.

None of the five slept well. Though they were physically tired, their minds were racing—filled with thoughts of what the next day might bring. Would they come face to face with Beings from another World? And if they did, what would their reactions be? Sue vowed later that she hadn't slept a wink, but Tony informed her that he'd been knocking on her door for five minutes before getting a reply.

Carla was as good as her word. She and Peter hovered round these special guests of theirs, seeing that they all ate a hearty breakfast. Chris fancied that they were looking at him and his companions with special concern. He swallowed his last cup of coffee with studied casualness.

"Right," he said, rising to his feet. "Shall we go?"

Only one of the other guests at Le Saumarez even suspected that great events were about to happen, that these four men and this girl were about to do something concerned with last night's U.F.O. It had been a good move to hire George Louvet and his taxi on a permanent basis. Now Derek could follow these five wherever they went.

As soon as Chris and the others had driven off, the reporter went outside the Hotel, where the faithful George was waiting.

"Follow them?" grinned George. He was being paid very generously. If this went on for long, the purchase of Henry would become a distinct possibility.

The five drove to the Underground Hospital in silence. They were fully conscious of the nature of their expedition. What would happen, they wondered, when they came face to face with the Visitors?

Well—it had to happen some time, Chris told himself. If the Universe was teeming with life, much of it highly intelligent, then it could only be a matter of time before our own little backwater, called Earth, was explored by Beings who had the ability to do so. Such Beings would possess knowledge and capabilities beyond our imagining. Chris prayed that they would be tolerant of our limitations.

The car pulled on to the deserted car park, and Mr. Desmoulins and his engineer were waiting. They rushed up to the car.

"We've heard what's happened," the Manager burst out. "They're here, aren't they?"

"We think so," Chris replied quietly, hoping to calm him. "All the reports seem to indicate that the U.F.O. was making for this area late last night, so we're going inside to have a look."

As he was speaking Chris saw the notices announcing that the Underground Hospital would be closed to visitors for the present. Even as the little group was speaking together a car load of tourists pulled up, and then went away disappointed.

"What exactly would you like Carter and me to do?" Mr. Desmoulins enquired of Chris.

"Come with us into the Hospital as far as the unfinished tunnel. Then I'd like you to remain at its entrance while we go into it. We may want you for communications."

"But suppose things go wrong with the Visitors, what do we do?" asked Mr. Carter.

"Get out of the Hospital as quickly as you can and inform the Bailiff," Chris smiled, "but I'll gamble that won't happen. Ready, Sue?"

The girl nodded without speaking. She knew that she was about to undertake the most exciting—possibly the most dangerous—act of her life. In spite of continually reassuring herself that everything would be fine, she felt more than a little scared.

But of course she wouldn't dream of letting these four young men know.

"Off we go then," Chris said as casually as he could manage, and strode off towards the entrance and the museum. Together with the manager and his engineer, the little party entered the gloomy tunnels. On any other occasion Tony might have been tempted to raise a shout so that he could listen to the weird echoes that would be flung back. Now he was silent and serious like the rest of them.

They had gone some little distance and had passed the ends of many of the former wards when Sue suddenly stopped.

"The mortuary," she whispered. "We're getting nearer to that awful place."

"Never mind. We are with you," Morrey assured her in an equally low voice. He took a firm grip on the girl's arm.

The lights were blazing away, but no amount of artificial illumination could have removed the sense of depression that these damp walls of concrete exuded. Vivid imaginary pictures of former activity came flooding into the minds of the young people. Even Morrey experienced a very tiny shudder.

They drew nearer to the former mortuary. This was the tunnel that had so upset Sue on her former visit. It was here that she had sensed the restless spirits of the young soldiers who had died in this subterranean mausoleum. It was here that she had first seen the blue glow which had been so strong when she later saw the "Angels".

Yes, Sue was almost certain that she could detect a blue tinge to the electric light around the entrance to the mortuary. Maybe it was her imagination, but she didn't think it was. She decided to say nothing to the others. They would soon speak out if they saw anything themselves.

Ah, here it was. They paused outside the dreaded tunnel. As before, the mortuary was but dimly lit, so perhaps this was why Sue thought that the blue aura showed up more strongly now. Then Serge spoke out.

"I can see it," he declared. "I can see a definite shade of blue in this light. Can any of you detect it?"

Sue was greatly relieved. It was good to know that someone else could see it. Now they would believe even more what she had told them. But what caused it? Certainly it didn't come from the bare electric bulbs, which were the same as all the others in the Underground Hospital. She hadn't been conscious of it during her second visit, when there were no "Angels" about. So were they here now? Was this blue glow in the mortuary a sign that they had returned to the Underground Hall?

"Let's press on," suggested Chris, and they set off again silently—almost reverently.

Now they reached the entrance to the unfinished tunnel, and stopped once more. Mr. Desmoulins was sweating slightly even in the cool atmosphere of this underground place. Mr. Carter was calmer, but he betrayed tension by the twitching of his hands. Sue, it seemed, was the most composed of them all.

Tony waved his hand to the two Islanders in what was intended to be a carefree manner as the four young men and the girl started off resolutely along the unfinished tunnel.

They had all been in this same tunnel only a few days before, so they were aware of the fallen rocks and made their way round them quite easily. Chris, in the lead, refrained from switching on his torch. He wanted to see if he could detect the blue glow that would seem to indicate the presence of the Visitors. Sue kept close to his side. She, too, was peering ahead to catch the first sign of the "Angels' " presence.

The light from the main tunnel had now diminished almost to vanishing point, and they should have been in almost total darkness. But they were not. They could still see each other's outlines faintly. And there was no question about it. The very faint light by which they could just see was undoubtedly blue.

"It is blue, isn't it?" Tony asked in a whisper.

The others didn't reply, but, with quickened pulses, walked slowly forward. As they did so the blue light became a little stronger. There could no longer be any doubt about it. They could see each other plainly now, and the illumination was definitely blue.

Then they came to the bend in the tunnel. The shining walls reflected the blue light from the Hall ahead. All five stopped.

From this point Sue would go on alone. Her four friends would wait while she went to make the first ever voluntary contact between Humans and Beings from Outer Space.

"Good luck, Sue," whispered Chris, and the other three added their good wishes. They had no desire to be too dramatic, so there was no final hand-shake or pat on the back. With a cheerful smile Sue went on ahead.

The girl now recalled vividly her former experience. She had been filled with panic when she had passed the mortuary on the first occasion. Then all fear had passed away as she had walked towards the blue light at the end of the unfinished tunnel. Her feelings had changed to happiness and exhilaration as she had caught her first glimpse of the "Angels", and it had been the intensity of her emotions which had caused her to faint. This time she would be prepared. She would know what to expect. And this time she had a very important mission.

Though she didn't know it, Sue was humming a happy little tune as she drew nearer to the source of the light. She couldn't wait to meet the "Angels" again, and she was quite confident that they would receive her kindly. No one who looked as they did could do any other.

Now she was at the end of the shiny tunnel and at the entrance to the Hall itself. With a quiver of anticipation she stepped forward. And then she saw them.

Twelve

A furious row had broken out between Sir William Gillanders, Director of the United Nations Exploration Agency, and General Edward Whittle, the Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces of the United Nations. Sir Billy had tried to get a firm assurance from the General that no hostile action would be taken against the Visitors from Space unless, and until, they had themselves given evidence of hostile intent.

Sir Billy paced his office angrily. Couldn't this stubborn

General see that here was the greatest opportunity that had ever occurred in the history of Earth to learn more about the Universe and the fantastic techniques that must exist? Couldn't Whittle understand that his puny powers would be useless against Beings who had developed the ability to traverse the unimaginable distances of Space? Hadn't the General sufficient intelligence to realise that a hostile act against them could result in terrible consequences? Surely this madman wouldn't do anything without orders?

The General had refused to give any such undertaking to Sir Billy, saying that the safety of the Peoples of Earth was his concern and nothing to do with the Director of U.N.E.X.A. He would use his own judgement, Whittle had told Sir Billy during the stormy meeting, and the Director must be content with that.

Now that he was alone Whittle helped himself to another coke from his icebox. He went to a mirror and smoothed down his sleek black hair, about which some of his subordinates had speculated so unkindly. He sipped his coke and hummed a little tune to himself. No matter what any crazy scientist or half-baked politician said, he, Edward Whittle, would wipe out any Invaders from Space. It would be no use for those weak and soft-hearted opponents to admit that they were wrong after the Invaders had taken over. The time to take action was as soon as they appeared, and this the General was inflexibly determined to do. It was infinitely better to sacrifice a few thousand lives of Guernsey Islanders than to allow the countless millions of the rest of Earth's population to become enslaved or even wiped out.

He glanced at one of the phones on his desk. He had only to pick it up and speak to the radio operator on duty for the code word to be flashed to Harold Smith's radio operator at Chaldon Down. Then the Mark IX would be on its way before anyone could do anything about it. Even if Harold's aiming accuracy wasn't all he boasted, such was the power of this new missile that everything within a radius of ten miles of its point of impact would be destroyed.

The General smiled to himself in satisfaction, but then his smile faded as he peered more closely into the mirror. Surely that wasn't grey hair that he could see? He would have to do something about it immediately he got back to his room.

There were three of them, and Sue stopped to take in their appearance. Previously she'd only glimpsed them for a few seconds before she fainted. Now she could gaze at them and see what they were really like.

Her impression that they were tall and fair was only partly confirmed. Certainly they were taller than most human beings by about twelve inches, but they were not all fair. One was quite dark.

All three appeared to be clothed in long, loose-fitting garments of white, though they might have been of the palest blue. Sue couldn't tell exactly, for each seemed to be shining with that characteristic glow—the blue aura she had noticed before. Her impression that they looked like the conventional pictures of angels was confirmed. She almost found herself looking for their wings.

How was it, she wondered, that over the centuries people could have painted pictures so like, and have so accurately described, these Beings from Space? Was it coincidence, or had they been seen on Earth before?

"Yes, Susan. We have been here many times already."

The girl was completely startled. The tallest of the Visitors was smiling and speaking to her! How could he have known her name and just what she had been thinking? She found no words to reply.

"We are happy that you have come to see us again, and we also look forward to meeting your friends," the tall Visitor went on.

"My friends?" Sue gasped. "You know they are here?"

"Yes. We know that Chris, Serge, Tony and Morrey are not far away. My name is Michael, and you can call me that if you wish, Sue."

"But—but you are from Space, aren't you? You have come from another World, haven't you?"

"Call it that if you will," Michael smiled. "We do come from elsewhere, but we have been here many, many times before."

Sue was now feeling a little more relaxed with these Beings from—she didn't know where. Michael was smiling at her, and so was one of the others. The third Visitor was looking more serious, but even his glance was kindly. Then Sue recalled her mission.

"Michael," she said, "I have been asked to tell you that you are welcome. My friends would like to come and speak with you if they may."

For a fleeting second Michael's face seemed to grow sad.

"Yes, I know that you and your friends are well disposed towards us," he said, "but there are many of your fellows who wish us harm. And it has ever been so. I will ask Chris and the others to come forward."

Sue was sure that Michael didn't call out or in any way attract the attention of her waiting friends. Afterwards the four young men told her that they had all had a sudden urge to go into the Hall. They knew, simultaneously, that it would be all right to approach the Visitors. Sue turned and saw her four companions standing in wonder at the entrance to the Hall.

"It's all right," she called out to them. "Michael and his friends will meet you."

Somewhat hesitantly the quartet moved forward. They were now experiencing the same mental shock that Sue had had on her first encounter. But to see the girl at ease with these smiling Visitors helped to calm the tumult of their feelings. The blue aura also seemed to bathe them in a sensation of peace and happiness.

"I am Michael," the leader of the Visitors announced to the newcomers. "And these are Alexander and Peter."

Did one shake hands with Superior Beings, or did one bow to them? The astronauts stood in embarrassed indecison.

"We are happy to meet you, Chris, Morrey, Tony and Serge," Michael said with a smile, knowing perfectly well what was going on in their minds. "Please be completely at ease."

"Thank you," Chris managed to get out. "We—we certainly feel strangely. You are welcome here, and we would like to talk to you. May we?"

"But of course," Michael agreed. "There is much that you will want to know. Some things we can tell you. Others you are not yet ready to learn."

Then Peter spoke for the first time. He was the most serious-looking of the Visitors. His voice was deep and clear as a huge bell. His dark hair glistened in the all-pervading blue light.

"We have been visiting your planet for thousands of years," he said. "We come to help you along the path of progress, but you will not accept our help or guidance. Always your race has preferred to live in its own way, hatred and greed being its most powerful motives."

"That's true," Chris agreed quietly. "Yet some are kind and generous."

"We know that," Peter conceded, "but by and large mankind is in a state of conflict. Conflict between individuals for possessions, and between nations for power. It is to help you to overcome these disastrous desires that we come from time to time to your planet."

"I'm afraid we haven't improved very much," Morrey said solemnly. "I wonder if we ever shall."

"Oh you will," the third Visitor, called Alexander, said confidently. "We have never yet failed. Some worlds take longer than others. We think your Earth is going to be a little slow in accepting the only kind of relationship that will permit it to survive."

"You visit other worlds?" asked Serge. "Are there many of them? Do they have—people—like us?"

"There are a very large number of worlds similar to your own," Michael smiled. "They do have inhabitants, some very much like yourselves. Others are very different."

Tony thought it was about time he took some part in the conversation. His first fear at seeing the Visitors had been overcome by an increasing curiosity about these Beings from Space.

"How did you get here?" he asked. "What method of propulsion did your ship use? Liquid oxygen or atomic drive?"

"Neither," Alexander replied with amusement. "We have many ways of reaching different parts of the Universe. The simplest way is by thought. We just think—"

"You don't mean to say that you can travel by, well, just thinking about it?" asked the astonished young astronaut.

"In effect, yes," the Visitor smiled. "But we have many other means of travel also. We choose the one most suitable to the place we are visiting."

"Why are you visiting Earth?" asked Chris. "Why have you come at this particular time?"

"We are sent by the Supreme Intelligence to see how the Human Race is progressing," Michael replied. "We investigate and report."

"And have we improved at all?" the Deputy asked.

"Not a great deal," Michael sighed. "Technically you are making a few faltering steps forward, but morally and spiritually you are making little advance. However, the Supreme Intelligence is infinitely patient, and we shall come back from time to time. We set you patterns to follow, but you ignore them."

Sue had been bursting to ask a question while they had been talking. To her great surprise Michael turned to her with a smile.

"I know what you wish to ask, Sue. It is—why have we chosen this particular place on Earth to visit? You feel it is gloomy and forbidding. You remember, or rather you think of, the hundreds of young soldiers and workers whose mortal life ended in the depths of this Hospital. But that didn't mean that they ceased to exist. Though they were freed from their poor, tortured bodies, their life-force lived on in these underground depths."

"The blue light! The light in the mortuary!" Sue gasped. "Was that—?"

"Yes. That blue light, glow or aura—call it what you will—comes from the Spirit or life-force. So many young men's spirits had been released that the mortuary retained some of their aura. We have come to set them free, to merge their life-force with our own, so that they will no longer be confined to this concrete cavern."

"How long will you be staying here? Will you be meeting other people?" Serge asked.

"We shall not be staying here very long," Michael replied, "and we shall be meeting only one other person."

"Who will that be?" Tony wanted to know. "The Bailiff?"

"I'm afraid you will have to wait and see," Michael told the young astronaut with a twinkle.

"O.K. O.K. Can we do anything for you? Do you want something to eat? Will you be staying down here all the time?"

It was Peter who answered Tony's queries.

"Your questions are many," the Visitor said with a smile. "There is nothing you can do for us at this moment, but Chris must go and report to Sir William. We will be staying in this chamber during our short visit. No, thank you, we do not take food as you do. Nor do we require rest as you do."

"Ah, well, that's that, then," Tony said, and he sounded very disappointed. "I was hoping we could take you back to our Hotel with us. The food is great, and you'd like Peter and Carla and their young son, Freddie."

"I'm sure we should," Michael answered, and all three Visitors were smiling at the young astronaut. "Maybe we will meet your friends some time. But not now."

"How did you know the name of our Chief?" Morrey asked. "For that matter, how did you know ours?"

"We know many things," Alexander told the five young people. "But now you will all want to return to your Hotel to think about this meeting. Chris will need to hurry to New York."

All five young people felt that they had seen and heard enough for one day. They felt an urgent need to go away and think about all that had happened. Chris, of course, knew that the Visitors were right when they said that he would have to go and report to Sir Billy immediately. But how did they know?

Thirteen

Morrey drove the car back to Le Saumarez. He drove slowly, which was unusual for him, for his thoughts were in a turmoil, as were those of his companions. They hadn't dreamt it, had they? They had met these Beings from Space, hadn't they?

Of course Chris must go to New York. He must get to Sir Billy as quickly as possible and tell his tremendous news. What would Sir Billy think? What would he want to do? Would he want to meet the Visitors? Was he the "one other" whom the Visitors said they would meet?

Back at Le Saumarez Peter had only to look at his guests to know that something tremendous had happened. He and Carla discreetly left them to their own devices for a time, but at last they could stand the suspense no longer.

"Have you seen—anything?" Peter asked the astronauts.

They were sitting quietly with Sue in a corner of the lounge, still preoccupied with their thoughts, but Chris pulled himself together at Peter's question. He looked round the lounge. The only other person there was the new guest with a beard, who, Chris noticed idly, appeared to be wearing a deaf aid.

"Yes, we have seen the Visitors from Space," he replied quietly. He wasn't going to risk being overheard, even though the other guest seemed to be deaf.

"We have met and talked to these people from the U.F.O." he went on, "and they mean us no harm. However, we must keep their presence here quite confidential."

Peter nodded understandingly. He would worry his guests no more, for he could see how affected they were by their encounter. As he went out he nodded towards Mr. Hayes at the far end of the lounge. Little did he or the astronauts know that, with the aid of a very sensitive eavesdropping device that had served him well in the past, Derek Hayes had heard their brief but significant conversation. The reporter switched off his "hearing aid" as Chris rose to go to the phone, and the other four went into the dining-room. Ten minutes later Chris was speaking to his Chief.

"We've met them," was all he said. "I must come and see you at once."

He heard the sharp intake of breath over those thousands of miles, and he knew that the Director would want to ask him innumerable questions.

"Very well," Sir Billy said after quite a pause, "I'll make the usual arrangements."

The reporter and George Louvet, the taxi driver, were speaking together in low tones. George sipped at his second glass of whisky.

"I shall do her no harm," Hayes was saying, "but it will be the best way of getting the whole story out of her. Take us to that old fort, leave us there for an hour, and there's a thousand pounds for you."

Poor George was torn. He didn't like the idea of being party to a kidnapping, but his new friend had promised that he wouldn't hurt the girl—and a thousand pounds would make sure he could buy Henry the bull.

"All right," he said, but in spite of his drink his throat felt dry.

"It is Miss Howard, isn't it?"

The reporter had been waiting for many hours before he had the chance to speak to Sue on her own. Her companions had gone to their rooms to write out their reports before turning in for the night, and Sue had come to look for Carla to see if she could scrounge a cup of tea. She was missing Chris, who had already left to see Sir Billy.

"Yes, I'm Susan Howard."

"Are you by any chance Sir Anthony Blackham's secretary?"

"Yes, that's me," Sue smiled. "Have you been one of his patients?"

"He did a pretty good job on me about three years ago," Hayes lied. "I remember you made my appointment. I thought it was you."

"It's very flattering of you to remember me," Sue laughed. "I'm sorry I can't say I recall you."

"That's not surprising," the reporter grinned. "You must see hundreds of patients in a year. But let me get you a drink, Miss Howard."

"Well—I was just going to ask for a cup of tea," Sue said uncertainly.

"Then have a night-cap instead," the reporter insisted. "By the way, my name is Derek Hayes."

"All right then, Mr. Hayes," Sue agreed. She didn't want to appear unfriendly.

"Here on holiday?" the reporter asked conversationally as they sipped away.

"Yes, I suppose so," Sue answered. How could she tell this man that she was really here to help Chris and his friends? She could never tell him that she had come to meet the Visitors from Space.

"Your friends," Hayes said, "aren't they the famous astronauts? They're not thinking of blasting off for the Moon from here, are they?"

"I don't think so," Sue replied. She was beginning to feel uncomfortable under Mr. Hayes's questions. She wished he'd leave her alone.

"They seem to be very interested in the Underground Hospital," the reporter went on relentlessly. "Didn't I see you all going into it this morning?"

"Yes," Sue admitted. She looked round for an excuse to escape.

"That's strange," Hayes went on with a peculiar smile. "The Hospital has been closed to ordinary visitors. You and your friends must be very special to get inside today."

The girl could stand his probing no longer.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hayes," she said getting to her feet and emptying her glass, "I must go to my room. Thank you for the drink."

"Thank you, Miss Howard," the reporter said, standing up politely. "I hope we shall meet again."

Sue went to her bedroom and locked the door behind her. There was something about the man with the beard that she didn't like. She wished Chris and the others had been with her. She had a strong suspicion that Mr. Hayes wouldn't have asked them those questions, and she wondered if she should tell her friends about him. Then she shrugged her shoulders. They would probably laugh at her and tell her that her imagination was playing tricks. She picked up a magazine and began to look through it idly.

Sue must have been reading the magazine for about half an hour when a tap came at the door. Without thinking she went at once and opened it, expecting to see one of her friends. It was the man with the beard.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Miss Howard," Mr. Hayes said, "But there is someone outside asking for you urgently."

"Asking for me?" the girl said in surprise. "Who is it? What do they want?"

"I've no idea," Hayes said, "but it seems to be urgent."

Sue wondered if there was something wrong at home. Had something happened to her mother or brother or Aunt Jenny? She hurried after the reporter, too upset to think of letting the others know of this emergency.

"Your visitor is in a taxi at the side door," Mr. Hayes called back over his shoulder as he led the way. The poor girl was too worried to notice anything strange in this, so she followed the reporter to the side door which led to the hotel car park. Her three closest relatives had all been in good health when she left them, but perhaps one of them had had an accident. Mr. Hayes stood aside to let her go first through the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, peering into the taxi in the growing gloom. "What's the matter?" She barely noticed that the engine of the taxi was running, and that the driver was watching nervously.

"Get inside, Miss Howard," the bearded man said from behind her. Some sixth sense warned Sue, but before she could draw back he had given her a violent push which sent her sprawling on the taxi's floor. Then he jumped in and slammed the door. The taxi, its engine racing, shot forward and out of the car park.

Sue didn't know whether she was more frightened or angry. She struggled up from the floor, but her abductor clamped a hand tightly across her mouth and held her firmly with his other arm.

"Keep quiet and still, Miss Howard," he hissed, "and you'll come to no harm."

She struggled with all her strength, but Hayes was too strong for her. She tried to cry out, but his hand gagged her cruelly. After a few minutes she was exhausted, and, shivering with fear, she sank on to the seat.

"That's better," Hayes said, slightly loosening his grip on her. "I'm taking you to a quiet place where we can have a good talk. If you co-operate, you won't get hurt, and you'll be back at the Hotel in less than an hour."

He must be mad, Sue thought, and her fear increased.

Barely had Chris seated himself in front of his Chief when he spilled out an account of that momentous meeting. He told Sir Billy everything he could remember, describing the Visitors in detail, and recalling as far as he could every word that had passed between them.

"The greatest moment in all human history!" Sir Billy breathed. "How utterly wonderful!"

"What's the next move?" asked Chris.

"I think we must be guided by the Visitors themselves," Sir Billy said thoughtfully. "If they can read minds and implant thoughts they have mental powers that perhaps we cannot even dream of. That they have incredible techniques is obvious. So—they must set the pace."

"I wonder why they are not staying long," Chris mused, "and why they said they would be seeing only one other human."

"I'm uncertain as to how far we could, or should, let this be known," the Director said thoughtfully.

"At least we are sure that our first Visitors from Space wish us well," observed Chris. "And, actually, they have come to help us to progress. Not even your Commander-in-Chief can believe they mean us harm."

At the mention of General Whittle, Sir Billy's face clouded.

"I'm not so sure," he said slowly. "The C-in-C is a man of set ideas. He's convinced that his main object in life is to protect Planet Earth from *any* invaders, as he calls them. Oh, I've had some very heated arguments with him. The man won't see sense."

"When he hears about the Visitors he'll have to alter his attitude," Chris said confidently. "No one could doubt their good intentions."

"I hope you're right," the Director sighed, "and that reminds me. Will you record your report as fully as you can? It will certainly be a historic document."

"Certainly," Chris agreed. "I'll do it at once. Do you think it will do any good if I see the Commander-in-Chief myself? Surely I can convince him that the Visitors are friendly."

"Good idea," Sir Billy nodded. "Perhaps a talk with someone who has actually met the Visitors will convince even our obstinate General Whittle that he's wrong. Yes. Finish your report, Chris, and I'll request an interview with the General."

Chris spent the next few hours dictating and checking his report. Yes, it was all there. It gave a fair picture of the Visitors. He wondered if it might be possible to take a camera and record their likenesses. Perhaps he might ask if he could do this when next they met. Then Chris smiled to himself. It was strange how he was already beginning to defer to the Beings from Space.

"Gosh! I'm tired," Chris told his Chief when he'd finished his task.

"I guessed you would be," Sir Billy smiled as he took the newly typed pages. "There's a bed ready for you in the rest room. I'll get a hot drink and some sandwiches sent in. Sleep well, Chris, and come and see me when you wake."

The young Deputy didn't require any rocking. He was barely able to finish the drink that Sir Billy had sent him before he fell asleep in one of the rest rooms often used by members of the staff. Meanwhile his report was being duplicated for the usual distribution. Sir Billy himself took the Commander-in-Chief his copy.

"Read this well, General," he said. "Our Visitors have arrived and this will leave you in no doubt about their good intentions and complete lack of hostility. If you still have any doubts my Deputy will come and give you a first-hand account of his meeting with them."

General Whittle could barely conceal the excitement he felt. So the Aliens had arrived, had they? And this scientist and his underling thought the Aliens were harmless, did they? How little they knew about the wiles of an enemy! How naive could they be? He, Edward Whittle, was not deceived.

"Thank you, Gillanders," he said curtly. "I will study the report later."

With studied indifference he put it away in one of the drawers of his desk.

"Aren't you going to read it at once, General?" Sir Billy asked, ignoring the discourtesy of the C-in-C's words. "I think you ought to do so. Then I'm sure your mind will be at rest about the Visitors. Any defensive plans you may have been contemplating are obviously unnecessary."

"Thank you. I will make up my own mind when I've found time to read this report of young Godfrey's. Until then I'm afraid I'm very busy, so can I ask you to excuse me?"

Sir Billy felt his anger rising at the insolence of this arrogant man. His position in the United Nations hierarchy was such that he was entitled to courtesy and respect even from the Commander-in-Chief, but he swallowed his ire.

"Nevertheless," he went on without budging, "I must ask you to let my Deputy give you a personal report. Surely it is your duty to learn all the facts."

The General's face flushed.

"I don't need you to tell me where my duty lies," he snapped. "I know what my duty is, and be sure I shall fulfil it."

"This report has already gone to the Secretary General and to the President of the Council," Sir Billy said meaningly. "I'm sure they will give it the close attention it deserves."

"No doubt. No doubt," Whittle said testily, "but matters of security are my responsibility alone. I will decide—eventually—if any action is required following this report."

"But will you see my Deputy?" Sir Billy persisted. "You need not be afraid of him," he added slyly.

"Afraid? Don't be ridiculous, Gillanders. But why should I see him? Everything is in his report, isn't it?"

"Certainly. But I thought you might want to question him. No doubt with your skill in cross-examination you will be able to elicit facts that he has forgotten about," Sir Billy said with his tongue in his cheek.

The General was slightly mollified. If it would get rid of this tiresome scientist he'd agree to see his young Deputy. It shouldn't be too difficult to get rid of him as well.

"Very well," he agreed. "Send him here in, say two hours' time. I can only spare him a few minutes."

As soon as Sir Billy had left the General grabbed the phone.

"Get me Chaldon Down. Major Smith," he barked into the instrument.

While he was waiting for the call to come through he paced the office impatiently. Perhaps he'd better wait till he'd seen Gillanders' Deputy before he gave the order that would destroy the Island of Guernsey and the Alien Invaders with it. Too bad about the inhabitants, but that was their misfortune.

It was by the merest chance that Serge happened to look through his bedroom window, which was on the side of the Hotel and looked out on to the car park. He'd opened it for a moment to let in a breath of fresh air, and he wondered, idly, whom the taxi might be waiting for. He was shutting the window before turning away when he saw two people come out to the waiting vehicle. The girl in front looked remarkably like—it was!—Susan! Even as Serge watched in surprise the man pushed her into the taxi, which immediately shot away. He put his head out of the window to look, and he was almost sure that someone was struggling in the back of the taxi.

Serge wasted no time. In a flash he'd sprinted downstairs and into the car park. Without waiting to call Morrey and

Tony he raced to their hired car and jumped inside. Though he'd never driven it before, he started it up and drove it quickly in the direction the taxi had taken. But which way had the vehicle gone? And why had Sue been abducted? The more he thought about it, the more worried Serge became. He'd save her from her abductors if it was the last thing he did.

George Louvet was feeling extremely unhappy. As he drove at a fast speed along narrow lanes, he began to have the first regrets at becoming involved in this strange affair. The thousand pounds was very tempting, but his misgivings grew as he heard the young girl struggling in the back of his vehicle. He wished now that he'd had nothing to do with the wretched business.

"How much farther?" Derek Hayes demanded from the back seat. This healthy young girl was proving quite a handful. He'd be glad when they had bundled her into the deserted German Fort that the taxi driver had recommended.

"Down these lanes it will take about another fifteen minutes," George called back over his shoulder. "You did say to keep off the main roads."

George Louvet prided himself that he knew every inch of the Island. Narrow roads, some little more than cart tracks, could get them across to L'Ancresse Bay quite unobtrusively. Darkness was falling, but the taxi driver pressed on with confidence. If only it had been a different kind of assignment he would have been enjoying it. Still—Mr. Hayes had promised that he would not hurt the girl, so he supposed it was all right.

Serge soon came to a stop. The taxi had long since disappeared. He'd seen no sign of it on any of the roads he'd scorched along. Now he had to admit that he hadn't the remotest idea where Sue could have been taken to.

But had Sue gone against her will? He was almost sure the man with her, who had seemed vaguely familiar, had pushed her into the taxi. He supposed he could have been mistaken about thinking that there was a struggle in the back of the vehicle. If some friend had come to take the girl for a ride, he'd feel a fool when he found her, only to be told not to be silly. Yet Sue hadn't mentioned having any other acquaintances on the Island, which was rather strange. He drove back to the Hotel as quickly as he could in the darkness.

A worried pair of astronauts awaited him.

"What's happened? Where have you been? Where's Sue?" demanded Tony and Morrey together.

Serge told them of what he had seen and how he'd lost track of the taxi.

"Perhaps I'm just imagining things," he said apologetically.

He went on to say that he thought he recognised the man who had gone with Sue in the taxi. He was almost certain it was the deaf man with the beard, who was a new arrival at the Hotel. An enquiry from Peter established that Mr. Hayes was a reporter from London, though he didn't know which paper he worked for. A knock on Hayes's bedroom door got no reply, and when Peter let himself in with his pass key, he found that all the reporter's clothes had been removed, even though the room had been paid for, for a fortnight.

"If it was Hayes, why was he taking Sue in a taxi?" demanded Tony. "She didn't know him."

"If Hayes is a reporter his interest in Sue could well be to get information from her about what has happened," said Serge with a frown. "We must find her before that."

They all knew that it could be disastrous if a garbled account of their meeting with the Visitors was splashed about in the newspapers. It could completely upset any plans that Sir Billy and Chris might be discussing to strengthen contact with the Visitors.

The taxi screeched to a halt outside one of the old German Forts that ringed L'Ancresse Bay. Hayes, pausing only long enough to confirm that there was no one near, flung open the door and forced the girl out of the vehicle. With his one hand he twisted the girl's arm behind her back, and his other hand was still clamped tightly over her mouth. Sue made a desperate effort to tear herself free, but the reporter was a strong man, and she had no chance. She was pushed inside a small doorway into total darkness, and Hayes kicked the door to behind him. She was a prisoner.

George Louvet had seen Sue's last hopeless struggle, and it was this that finally changed his mind. He could stand it no longer. The thousand pounds didn't matter. Better to lose it than have this girl's life on his conscience. But what was he to do? Mr. Hayes was far stronger than he, and he would have little chance of rescuing Miss Howard. If he went to the police he would be accused of taking part in the abduction. On the other hand, if he could let the girl's friends back in the hotel know where she was, no doubt they would rush out and rescue her. He drove his taxi quickly to the nearest phone box.

The three astronauts climbed into their car. Where they were going to look they had no idea, but they couldn't just sit still and do nothing. If they had to go over the Island with a toothcomb they would find Sue. Morrey let in the clutch and they moved forward. Then a figure emerged from the hotel, waving frantically.

It was Peter, and the big man was breathless from his effort to catch the three.

"Phone," he gasped. "It's urgent."

Perhaps it was Sue herself to tell them she was all right. Maybe their fears were unjustified. Serge jumped out of the car and ran to the phone.

"Yes?" he called sharply into the instrument.

"Miss Howard is in a fort at L'Ancresse Bay," a man's voice said, and then the phone went dead. By this time Tony and Morrey had joined the Russian, who placed the receiver back on its rest and told the others about the strange brief message.

"Then what are we waiting for? Off to L'Ancresse Bay," Morrey said.

They didn't waste time speculating who might have sent the message or the reason for it. All that could come later. The most urgent thing now was to find Sue before that reporter had forced her story from her. They dared not think what he might do to get it.

The car reached the Bay much more quickly than had the taxi, for Morrey was able to drive along main roads, which he did at high speed in the light traffic. They shuddered to a halt beside one of the old German forts.

During their headlong drive Serge, who had been studying a large-scale map, discovered that there were no fewer than six of these forts ringing the Bay. To which one had the telephone caller been referring?

"I'll drop you off here, Tony," Morrey said. "You do the first two. I'll take Serge to the next pair, and I'll carry on and search the last two."

The Russian went up to the first of his pair of forts. By the light of his torch he examined the door carefully, and he could see at once that it hadn't been opened for years, so he raced on to the second one. Ah, this was a possibility. The bolt and the hinges had been oiled, and there was no dust in the crack between the door and the post. Cautiously, he pushed it open.

A muffled sound told Serge he had come to the right place. The beam of his torch showed a large dusty room with a door in the opposite wall. It was from this doorway that the sound was repeated. In a few bounds Serge was across the room and thrusting through the inner doorway. There, in a corner, was Sue in the grasp of the bearded reporter.

"Let her go!" Serge spat out as he hurled himself across the room. The torch fell to the floor but still remained alight.

A great foot came up and caught the Russian in the stomach, sending him sprawling. Winded, he struggled gamely to his feet, and though he was a much slighter man than Sue's assailant, he hurled himself on Hayes.

The girl's heart had leapt with relief when she saw Serge; it had been all she could do to resist her attacker's attempt to break her down. She had winced at the blow that hurled her friend to the floor, but now she renewed her struggles, and sank her teeth into the hand across her mouth. There was a roar from the reporter as he faced Serge and aimed another kick at him.

This time the Russian was more cautious and easily avoided the heavy boot. He grasped the reporter, but Hayes shook him off roughly, and struck him a heavy blow with his fist. It caught Serge full in the mouth, and he felt the taste of his own blood.

But he grabbed the reporter's flailing arm before he could repeat the blow.

Sue saw the vicious punch that Serge had taken, and in desperation she pulled the long nails of her right hand down Hayes's bearded face. Hayes cried out and let her go, turning all his attention to the Russian. Soon Serge was reeling from his vicious blows, but Sue snatched off a shoe and beat Hayes over the head with all her strength. Serge managed to land some shrewd blows on his face, and at last he collapsed on the floor.

Breathless and half sobbing, Sue flung herself into Serge's arms. Both of them were exhausted, and neither could speak for several moments.

"Let's get out of here," Serge panted. "Morrey and Tony should be somewhere about."

Without even a glance at the reporter, they staggered out of the fort, pausing only to recover Serge's torch. Once outside they took many deep breaths before they were able to relax. Then someone came running towards them. It was Tony.

"You've found her, then," he called. "Thank goodness. What's happened?"

Before either could reply Morrey drove up and leapt out of their car.

"She's safe! Where's Hayes?" he demanded.

Serge nodded back towards the fort, and Morrey was about to go in, but Serge put a hand on his chest.

"Let's get Sue back to the hotel first," he gasped, and now Tony and Morrey could see the state their two friends were in.

"Right," Morrey said grittily, "we'll come back for Mr. Derek Hayes later."

Safely in the car, Sue found it hard to avoid breaking down, but before they reached Le Saumarez she had told them about the efforts of the reporter to extract their story.

"Thank heaven you found her in time," Morrey said to Serge. "That man could have done great harm."

Back at Le Saumarez Carla and Peter were waiting. As soon as they saw the state of Sue and Serge they set about repairing the damage. Their faces were bathed with disinfectant and plaster was placed over several cuts. Just as Carla had finished and Peter had gone to get them all a drink, someone came to the Hotel and asked for them. It was the taxi driver, George Louvet!

He was pale, nervous and tense. Yet he came up to Sue and the astronauts without hesitation.

"I'm glad you got my message," he said simply. "I've come to tell you how it all happened."

"Why didn't you call the police?" demanded Morrey, when the story had been told.

"I don't want to get involved with the police if I can help it. I have my licence to think about."

"But you have admitted being involved in kidnapping Miss Howard," Morrey went on sternly. "We should report that to the police ourselves."

"Let's not do that, please," Sue said. "After all, he did let you know where to find me."

"Not exactly," Tony pointed out. "But I'm willing to say nothing about Mr. Louvet if you others are also."

Rather grudgingly Morrey agreed, and Serge also nodded.

"But I'm now going to get that reporter," growled Morrey. "Want to come, Tony?"

The two astronauts set off for L'Ancresse Bay and the old German Fort, but forty minutes later they returned to Le Saumarez.

"The bird had flown," was all that Morrey would say. Hayes had not waited for them.

Fourteen

Next morning Serge's face was bruised and sore, but otherwise he felt none the worse for his encounter with the reporter, and Sue had recovered too. The four young people met at breakfast and wondered how they should spend the day.

"Let's go and see the Bailiff," Serge suggested.

Of course! Hadn't they promised to keep the Head of the Island Government fully informed? Sir Arnold would be expecting a call from them, for no doubt Mr. Desmoulins would have said something. Morrey backed out the car and the four of them drove to the Royal Court House.

Sir Arnold hadn't yet arrived, but was expected at any minute, they were told. Would they care to come in and wait? Of course they would. It was most important that they see him as soon as possible. The secretary, who had recognised them from their former visit, showed them into an ante-room next to the Bailiff's office.

"He'll want to meet the Visitors," Morey declared when they were left alone. "Maybe he'll want them to come here."

"I wonder what they are really going to do?" Tony mused. "They said they wouldn't be on Earth for very long. Will they stay inside that Hall, or will they come outside?"

"You can be sure our Visitors know what they are doing," Serge said. "If it's no part of their plan to come out of the Underground Hospital, then they won't do so."

Just then they heard Sir Arnold arrive in the office next door. A few seconds later the secretary came in and invited them to join the Bailiff.

"Well," the Bailiff burst out. "You've seen them, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir, we've seen them," Morrey replied on behalf of them all. "We saw them yesterday. There were three of them. We think they are Superior Intelligences."

Sir Arnold was shaken but fascinated. He waited for the astronauts to continue.

"We saw the U.F.O. land on the evening before last. Yesterday morning, with the Deputy, we entered the Underground Hospital and made towards the Hall. Miss Howard went on ahead and met the three Visitors from Space. We were invited along and had quite a conversation with them. They are very friendly," Morrey concluded.

There was a long silence in the office as the Bailiff struggled to accept the amazing news that these young people had brought.

"Do they need anything?" he asked. "Will they be coming outside?"

"We asked that," Morrey replied. "I gather that they will not be leaving the Hospital, and they don't need food or sleep as we do. They said that they will meet just one other Human."

Sir Arnold brightened up.

"Perhaps it is I whom they wish to meet," he said, "and I'd very much like to meet them."

"I don't know," Morrey said non-committally. "We'd better wait till Chris gets back."

"Pity," sighed the Bailiff. "I'd like to have given them an official welcome."

Sir Billy Gillanders shook Chris gently. The Deputy had been having strange dreams and was deeply asleep. Gradually he woke and sat up.

"I've fixed up your meeting with the C-in-C," the Director said. "You'll find him very tough."

As Chris entered the elevator to the General's office, he recalled the vivid dreams he'd been having during his deep slumber. In them the three Visitors told him all about themselves.

Michael told the sleeping Chris that he was the representative of the Supreme Intelligence of the Universe, whose desire it was to help the human race to raise itself from its present state of greed, hatred and evil.

Peter explained that his speciality was healing, that Mankind was responsible for much of its own physical and mental distress. Some day—perhaps when we had progressed far enough—we should have far healthier bodies and minds.

Alexander revealed that he had visited many other intelligent races, and that we humans would all raise ourselves to heights undreamed of at present.

When Chris, in his dream, had asked the visitors when and how this could be, Michael had replied that the time was not yet, that there was still far too much strife in our World, and that some people didn't want to progress.

"Even now," Michael had said surprisingly, "there is someone who is planning to destroy this Island so that we, too, may be destroyed."

"What can I do?" Chris had asked in despair.

"You will soon be visiting this person," Michael had told him. "Bring him to see us, and we will convince him of his error."

The elevator stopped at the floor given over to the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Billy was waiting in the corridor.

"Come along and I'll introduce you to him," the Director said grimly. "I hope you can make him see sense."

"Come!"

It was more a bark than an invitation to enter. Sir Billy led the way into the General's office. With his usual studied insolence to these so-called scientists, the General remained seated behind his desk. Chris saw Sir Billy flush at this deliberate discourtesy, but he himself felt quite calm. He imagined he heard the voice of Michael telling him to take it easy.

"General, this is my Deputy, Christopher Godfrey. As I explained to you, he has actually met these Visitors from Space. He is willing to answer any questions you may ask."

If the General thought that his long and penetrating stare in any way intimidated Chris he was sadly mistaken. The young Deputy returned the fierce look of the Commander-in-Chief calmly and steadfastly. Something told him that he'd not the slightest cause to fear this powerful General. Actually Chris felt slightly amused at the other's blatant attempt to browbeat him before the questions had even started.

"Well," the General snapped, "have you anything to add to this report of yours? How much of it is true and how much of it is imagination?"

"It is quite true and quite accurate," Chris replied, ignoring the suggestion implicit in General Whittle's question. "My companions and I have truly met and spoken with these Visitors from Space."

"You're quite sure you didn't dream it all up? Have you brought any proof of what you say? Any photograph, for example?"

"None, sir. You have my word and that of my companions, who would substantiate everything I have said."

"Did you see anything of their vehicle? Presumably they had one?"

"No, sir. We didn't see it. Nor did the Visitors explain how they got here," Chris replied. "But we saw the light of the U.F.O. as it approached, as did many other people on the Island."

"You had no difficulty in communicating with the Visitors? How do you explain that they apparently spoke English?"

"I don't know, General. Nor can I explain how they apparently picked up our thoughts. I can only imagine that they are able to communicate mentally, and in some way that overcomes the restriction of language."

Sir Billy had remained silent during this exchange between his Deputy and the Commander-in-Chief. He sensed that General Whittle remained completely unconvinced about the good will of the Visitors. He turned to Chris.

"You suffered no harm from these Strangers? You found them peaceful?" he asked the astronaut.

"We found them wonderful—well, I can only describe them as 'Creatures'. As you know, in my report I have likened them to the conventional pictures of Angels. They were pleasant and friendly to us. It seems that their only wish is to help."

"Typical!" the General thought to himself. He knew the technique very well. Pretend to be friendly. Win the confidence of your victims. Then, when they least expect it—strike! He'd seen it happen dozens of times, but it wasn't going to happen now—not if he, Ed Whittle, could help it. If these Aliens could deceive Gillanders, Godfrey and their crew, they couldn't do it to the Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces of the United Nations.

"Very well. Thank you for coming," the General said, standing up to indicate that the interview was at an end. "I will let you know if I wish to see either of you again. Goodbye."

Afterwards Chris could never explain what prompted him to speak. The words came unbidden into his mind and tumbled out in a torrent.

"General, come and see the Visitors for yourself. Come and judge for yourself whether they are friendly or hostile. You must come and see them."

General Whittle's mouth opened and shut. Was this young man seriously suggesting that he should call on these Aliens? Did he expect that someone in his position should lay himself open to the exercise of their power? It was evident that the Aliens had affected a subliminal conversion on this young man. In other words, they had captured his mind and bent it to their will.

"I have no intention of meeting your 'friends'," he replied harshly. "They are alien to this Earth and must be treated as such."

"You need not be afraid of them, General," Chris said innocently.

"Afraid!"

The General's face went purple at this insult. No one had ever been able to accuse him of cowardice, and no one ever should. Did this young upstart think that he, the Commander-in-Chief, feared to meet Creatures from Space? What utter rubbish. Edward Whittle feared neither man nor beast—whatever category these Creatures might come under. Seeing the feeling he had aroused in the General, Chris went on.

"I'm sure you would come to no harm, sir," he said. "Miss Howard has seen them twice and is none the worse. Will you come and judge them for yourself, General, or do you prefer to do it from the safety of your armchair?"

Armchair! No one had ever before had the audacity to call him an "Armchair General". His record showed that to be untrue. He'd never hesitated to share danger with the men under his command. Even if his duties now kept him for the majority of his time behind a desk at U.N.O. Headquarters, Ed Whittle was still the same man he had always been—completely fearless.

"I beg your pardon, General," the Deputy went on. "I didn't mean to imply that you are a coward. I merely thought that on such an important matter as this you would want to make a personal assessment of the situation. If you have any qualms, I've no doubt Miss Howard would go along with you."

This was too much! General Whittle's face now paled in fury. He had never been so insulted in his life. He could hardly refrain from striking the Deputy, but he regained control as an idea entered his head. He would show this upstart how fearless he was. At the same time he would ensure the destruction of the Invaders by giving Major Smith his orders personally.

"I will face your 'Visitors' myself," the General snapped, "but first I shall make a call on one of our installations in Britain."

Neither Sir Billy nor Chris noticed the way the General's eyes glinted at his last words. The Director was plainly astonished that his Deputy had goaded the Commander-in-Chief into a visit to the Underground Hospital, but he could see Chris's objective. If the General met the Visitors there was every chance that he would be impressed by them and no longer consider them hostile. Perhaps it would all work out right in the end.

"Thank you, General," Chris said quietly. "I'm sure you'll find it interesting. When will you be ready to go?"

"As Commander-in-Chief I am prepared to go anywhere at any time," the General answered stiffly. "Can you be ready in thirty minutes? I can."

"Whew!" breathed Chris. "As soon as that?"

Ed Whittle was slightly mollified at the impression he had made.

"Yes, as soon as that, young man. I shall expect you back in this office in twenty-nine and a half minutes' time."

"Then we'd better move fast," Chris grinned, and he gave Sir Billy a secret wink.

"Will you let the others know what's happening?" he asked his Chief as they hurried back to the General's office twenty-eight minutes later. Sir Billy, still partly stunned by events, said he'd be glad to, and would phone Guernsey as soon as Chris and the General were on their way.

At that moment Major Smith was putting down the phone. He'd just had an astounding call from his friend and superior. The General had told him that the Aliens were in the Underground Hospital, and that he, himself, was coming immediately to Chaldon Down.

The Commander-in-Chief looked very smart in the uniform of a five-star general. He wore masses of campaign and medal ribbons, together with the special U.N.O. badge that denoted his unique rank. Even Chris felt an impulse to salute as he entered the office. The handshake with Sir Billy was very perfunctory.

"Right! Let's go!" snapped the General in his best military style.

It was a sleepy Peter who reached over to take up the bedside telephone extension. Who the blazes could be phoning in the early hours of the morning? Perhaps it was a wrong number.

"Hello!" he called into the instrument, none too politely.

Then his whole attitude changed. Carla, who by this time was also roused, heard her husband say, "Yes, Sir William. Of course. I'll get him to the phone at once. No, not at all. Hang on."

"Sir William Gillanders calling from New York," he whispered to Carla, who was rubbing her eyes and yawning. "He wants to speak to Morrey."

Not even waiting to put on dressing gown or slippers, Peter climbed out of bed and went off to rouse the American astronaut. With a sigh Carla put on her own dressing gown and ran a comb through her hair. A cup of tea would be called for, she expected. She heard a knocking on a door some distance down the corridor.

"Morrey! Morrey! Wake up," Peter was calling. "It's the phone. You're wanted on the phone."

Morrey shot up in bed and switched on his light.

"Who is it, Peter?" he asked, for he'd recognised the proprietor's voice.

"It's Sir William calling you from New York," Peter replied. "He said it was urgent."

Morrey shot out of bed and flung open the bedroom door to see a tousled Peter waiting.

"Take the call in our office," the proprietor said. "I'll come along and switch on the electric heater."

They hurried along to the office as quietly as they could.

"Better not alarm any of the other guests," Peter whispered.

Morrey grabbed the phone and spoke into it a little breathlessly. There was an exchange of greetings with Sir Billy, and then the Director informed the astronaut that Chris was, at that moment, on his way back and—wait for it—he was bringing along General Whittle. Sir Billy explained that the C-in-C was hostile to the Visitors, but Chris, by a stroke of genius had challenged the General to meet them personally. The challenge couldn't be refused, so now both were over the Atlantic in the Commander-in-Chief's private jet.

"I believe the General has a call to make on the mainland," Sir Billy went on, "so Chris will probably arrive first. I don't know how long the General plans to stay on the Island, but no doubt your Hotel could accommodate him."

Morrey was sure that this could be arranged. He had recovered from his surprise at the Director's news and was looking forward to seeing Chris again in a few hours, and then, later, the redoubtable Commander-in-Chief.

"We'll look after him," he promised Sir Billy, "and we'll try and make him see sense."

"I'm sure you will," the Director said. "Tell Chris to phone me as soon as the General has met the Visitors."

"Thanks, Peter," Morrey said as he put down the phone. "I'm sorry you were woken up."

"Think nothing of it," Peter smiled, stifling a yawn. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Only go back to bed and apologise to Carla. See you at breakfast."

Morrey could hardly wait to tell his news next morning. But he contained himself until they were about to rise from the table, and then sprang his information on them. To say that they were surprised was putting it mildly.

"So that's what they meant!" Tony declared. "If you remember, they told us they would be seeing one other person before leaving. They must have meant General Whittle."

"I'm sure you're right," Sue said thoughtfully. "They do have powers that we don't know about. Might they not be able to influence events? Perhaps this is all part of their plan."

"But why the General?" Serge asked. "I would have thought it would have been better to have met Sir Billy, or the United Nations Secretary General."

"Well, no doubt our friends know best," Morrey said, "so shall we leave it to them?"

Fifteen

There had been little conversation between Chris and the General during the flight to Heathrow. The two had little in common, so Chris was content to doze and catch up with some of his lost sleep. The General, however, went to the radio operator and had several messages despatched. At the airport they wished each other a very stiff Goodbye.

"What time will you be arriving on the Island?" Chris asked as the General was about to turn away.

"I'll phone your Hotel. Then perhaps we can get this visit over and done with as quickly as possible."

"Very well. I'll meet you, take you to our Hotel, and then to the Underground Hospital. Will you want to meet the Bailiff?"

General Whittle knew that under ordinary circumstances anyone of his rank would expect to make a call on the Head of the Island Government. But on this occasion protocol would not be observed. The C-in-C had a very special reason for not prolonging his stay on the Island.

Edward Whittle looked through one of the helicopter's windows to see the white landing cross that had been put down to guide his machine. Even from that height he could see a little knot of uniformed men waiting nearby. Among them, he had no doubt, would be Major Smith. Knowing Harold, he expected the ultimate in spit-and-polish when he landed. A minute later the helicopter sank on to the white cross and its blades started to slow down.

There was a smart salute from the Major and the other officers as the Commander-in-Chief stepped out. Then Major Smith came forward and shook hands with his Chief, whom he introduced to the others. Another flurry of salutes followed before the Major led the General to the big caravan that he was using as his headquarters.

Once inside the Major closed the door carefully, and the two men were alone. The Major relaxed, and followed the General's example in putting aside his hat and undoing a few buttons of his tunic.

"They're here, Harold," the General said, "and I'm going to blast them to little pieces before they can do any damage."

"We're quite ready, except for arming the Mark IX, of course," replied the Major. "When do you want us to fire?"

The Commander-in-Chief looked very serious. He turned and looked his friend straight in the eyes.

"I'm going over there myself," he announced. "I'm going to take a look at these Aliens before destroying them utterly."

The Major was astounded.

"But—but is that a wise thing to do?" he asked. "What if they do something to you? What if things go wrong?"

"I have thought of that," General Whittle replied, "but I feel it is my duty to see for myself what these Creatures look like. My visit will be a short one, and I shall be back here before you launch the missile."

"Gee! You've got a nerve, Ed," Harold said admiringly, and the General looked not at all displeased at his subordinate's admiration.

"But what if something goes wrong?" the Major asked suddenly. "Suppose these Aliens prevent you from returning?"

"It's quite simple," the Commander-in-Chief said calmly. "It's nearly noon now. I shall make my call and be away within the next five hours. The Mark IX can be launched at 18.00 hours precisely."

"And if you're still on the Island?" the Major asked, his throat dry.

"You will still launch the Mark IX," General Whittle said firmly.

"But I can't. Not if you are still there. I—"

"You can—and you will. That is an order. The Mark IX is to be launched at 18.00 hours precisely, whether you have heard from me or not."

The Major sprang to his feet.

"Very good, sir," he said with his snappiest salute. "No doubt you will give me that order in writing."

"Of course, Major," the General replied formally. He took a typewritten sheet from his pocket and signed it with a flourish.

"That is your order, Major. You will obey it without question."

"Very well, sir."

No more was said of the launching. Major Smith offered his Chief some refreshment, and the General made a quick inspection of the Chaldon Down site. Already a team of men was removing the covers from the missile and preparing the launching stand for its reception.

The General paused in front of the Mark IX. This was the missile which, in five and a half hours' time, would destroy the Aliens, the largest part of the Island of Guernsey, and perhaps himself too. The Major guessed what was going through the General's mind. His admiration for his friend's courage and sense of duty increased enormously.

"Your machine is ready, sir," reported the helicopter pilot, who had just joined them. There was more saluting and shaking of hands before the C-in-C stepped into the aircraft. As it rose slowly from the ground Major Smith gave a special salute.

"A very brave man," he whispered to himself.

Morrey, Sue, Serge and Tony were at the airport to meet Chris.

"Gosh! It's good to see you again," Sue burst out, planting a kiss on his cheek.

"Look, he's blushing," grinned Tony, as Chris sheepishly wiped off the lipstick.

"Rubbish," the Deputy snorted. "Let's get to the hotel. I've lots to tell you."

However, by the time they had reached Le Saumarez Chris had already told them all. They gasped when he told them how, on a sudden impulse, he'd challenged the Commander-in-Chief to see the "Angels" for himself.

"I thought it was the only way to convince him that they wish us well," Chris said. "I'm sure that Michael, Peter and Alexander can convince him even if we cannot."

"When is he coming?" asked Morrey.

"He's making a stop at a place called Chaldon Down on the south coast, near Weymouth. He has to inspect some U.N.O. troops there. Then he's coming straight here. I expect he'll arrive this afternoon."

It was five minutes to three when the blue and white helicopter began to settle on the shore just beyond the old German fort. Freddie, Peter's and Carla's young son, came rushing into the Hotel with the news. The five friends were finishing their coffee in the lounge when the boy blurted out his story.

"It's he," Chris said shortly. "I'll go and meet him."

It was indeed. General Whittle was just stepping out of the machine when Chris and Morrey came racing over the sandhills.

"Sorry we were not here," Chris apologised. "I expected you would be landing at the Airport. You did say you would phone, you know."

"This will save time," the General snapped, "and I've none of that to spare."

"Will you come to our Hotel for a cup of coffee before we go to the Underground Hospital? This is my second-in-command, Morrison Kant. Morrey, this is General Whittle, Commander-in-Chief of the U.N.O. Forces."

"I'm proud to meet you, sir," Morrey said, holding out his hand.

The General chose to ignore it, but condescended to give a brief nod. He glanced at his watch. It was five minutes past three.

"Very well. I'll come for a quick coffee, but it will have to be snappy. How long will it take to get to the Underground Hospital?"

"The way Morrey drives—ten minutes," Chris grinned, but there was no answering smile from the General. They climbed into the car and sped the thousand yards to Le Saumarez.

Chris's friends were waiting with some trepidation for the arrival of the foremost military man on Earth. Peter and Carla were hovering in the background, and Freddie was peeping from behind the counter.

"The General would like some coffee," Chris told Peter.

"Make it quick," Whittle grunted.

"General Whittle, may I introduce my friends," Chris said, ignoring the Commander-in-Chief's brusque manner. "This is Tony Hale, this is Serge Smyslov, and this is Sue Howard."

The General gave a brief nod to Tony and Serge, but he shook hands quite warmly with Sue. So this was the young lady who had seen the Aliens twice. She certainly didn't seem any the worse for her adventure. In fact, she was quite attractive. Of course she was very young, perhaps thirty years younger than the General himself. Pity.

The Commander-in-Chief pulled himself together.

"I'm pleased to meet you all," he said. Perhaps seeing Sue had mellowed him a little. At that moment Carla came in with a tray.

"Coffee up!" she announced.

General Whittle glanced at his watch as Sue poured out. It was 15.30 hours. Time was rolling on, but he still had ample time to see these Aliens and to be back at Chaldon Down before the Mark IX was fired. But as he watched Sue hand round the cups he felt a sudden chill grip him. In a little over two and a half hours this girl would be dead. So would these young men who had already met the Invaders. And so would thousands of other people. The General steeled himself. It was a heavy burden that he bore, but his duty was clear. Cost what it might—even his own life—he must destroy the Invaders before it was too late.

The conversation was disjointed, even strained, but at last the coffee was finished.

"You'd like to go now, sir?" asked Chris.

The General nodded. It was 15.35 hours.

"Right. I'll get the car," Morrey said.

There was hardly room for all of them, but Peter offered to drive to the Hospital as well, so a few minutes later the two cars set off. General Whittle was in the front seat beside Morrey in the leading car, with Chris and Sue in the rear. Peter was driving Tony and Serge. As soon as they had left, Carla phoned Mr. Desmoulins to let him know that the party was on its way, and that it included General Whittle, the United Nations Commander-in-Chief. As a loyal Islander Mr. Desmoulins immediately passed this important piece of information on to his Bailiff. Sir Arnold cancelled all his appointments and hurried to the Underground Hospital to greet Guernsey's distinguished visitor. It spoke volumes for the skill of the Bailiff's chauffeur that he arrived at the car park just ahead of the two cars from Le Saumarez.

"Ah, General!" Sir Arnold said heartily as the man in military uniform stepped out of the leading car. "As Bailiff of this Island may I give you a warm welcome, and I trust that—"

"Sorry, Bailiff. I've no time to waste," General Whittle barked. "I have a task to do." He looked at his watch again. It was nearly four o'clock.

"But when you've finished your visit to the—er—Underground Hospital, you will join me for dinner at the Royal Court House?"

"Sorry again, Bailiff. I must be on my way back within the next hour," Whittle snapped.

Sir Arnold flushed at this discourtesy. It was something he wasn't used to. With thunder on his brows he turned abruptly and went back to his car. Chris, however, hurried up to him as he was getting in.

"I'm sorry about this, Sir Arnold," he apologised. "Perhaps you won't mind if my friends and I pay our respects to you again fairly soon?"

"Come any time you like, Mr. Godfrey," the Bailiff replied, relaxing a little. "If there's anything I don't like it's bad manners."

Chris returned to the others. The General kept glancing at his watch, so without further delay Chris signalled to Mr. Desmoulins to lead them into the Underground Hospital.

Major Smith stood back and looked at the towering missile with pride. His men had done a good job in getting it into position and completing its connection up to the caravan which was the control centre. As he admired its sleek, white painted sides, Harold had to keep reminding himself that here was the most deadly weapon yet devised by Man. It was uncannily accurate and its explosive power was fantastic. He felt a mounting sense of excitement as the time was drawing nearer for its first real test. 16.30 hours: Ed Whittle should be well away from the target area by now. He'd be glad when the C-in-C returned to Chaldon Down. He'd like his Chief to witness the launching for himself.

Chris led the way with the General. The other four followed in a little knot a few yards behind. Whittle glanced back at Sue several times. It was a pity that such an attractive young girl had to be destroyed, along with so many others, to save mankind from the Aliens. For a brief moment the General contemplated trying to persuade her to leave with him when he left the Island. But he was realistic enough to know that she would never agree unless he told her the truth. And that he could not do. No one on this doomed Island must know the fate that awaited them in less than two hours' time.

The party passed through the museum and into the Hospital proper. The light bulbs shone bravely in the gloom, and the drip of water echoed down the empty tunnels. The General looked appraisingly at the massive concrete construction. Its German builders had done a sound job of work, but he'd no doubt that his Mark IX would make short work of it. If all went well this vast concrete bunker would become a fused mass in a fraction of a second. Involuntarily he looked at his watch again. It was 16.40 hours.

"This was the mortuary," Chris said in a low voice as they passed that forbidding corridor. He wondered if the General could see the faintly blue glow that seemed to pervade it. If he did, Whittle didn't comment. He appeared very anxious to press on. Well—the sooner he met the Aliens, the better.

"Here we are," Chris told him. "We used to call this the Unfinished Tunnel, but the Visitors finished it off and are staying at the other end."

It was a quiver of anticipation, and nothing else, that went down Ed Whittle's spine at the young man's words. Within a few minutes, it seemed, he would come face to face with the Invaders. Once he'd seen them with his own eyes he would insist on returning to the surface and making for his helicopter.

"Has the General noticed the walls?" asked one of the astronauts, who was following. He thought it was Kant, the American. Godfrey took his elbow and edged him towards the tunnel wall. He looked at it with some impatience at first, for he'd no time to waste. But then he stared in growing astonishment at its glazed surface. It all went to prove that these Invaders must command advanced techniques that were highly dangerous. The sooner that Mark IX was on its way the better.

Chris led the way on. Soon they would be coming to the Underground Hall, and the blue aura was already visible. The General no longer felt apprehensive about meeting the Visitors from Space. Why should he? On the contrary, he was beginning to feel surprisingly relaxed.

"We don't know where this blue light comes from," Chris told him in a low voice, "but it's certainly associated with our Visitors."

It was a pleasant light, Ed Whittle told himself. He wondered if it could be produced commercially, for he'd prefer it to the harsh illumination of city life. But now they were about to step into the great Hall, which was bathed in the lovely blue light. Chris stopped and turned to his companion.

"General," he said, "meet our Visitors—Michael, Peter and Alexander."

Sixteen

To Edward Whittle it came as a great shock. He'd heard these Visitors described as having an angelic appearance, and he'd scoffed at the idea. But not now he could see them. Their wonderful faces shone with that blue aura, and they were looking at him with—well, it seemed like kindness and compassion.

Was this a gigantic bluff, and had they put on this benign appearance to disarm him? Or had he been completely mistaken in his assessment, or, rather, assumption? The General's mind was in a complete turmoil.

"Welcome, Edward Whittle," the one who seemed to be called Michael said with a gentle smile.

The Commander-in-Chief was unable to speak. These Visitors from Space had spoken kindly to him—the man who was going to destroy them and their Island refuge. Had he made the greatest error of judgement of all time? His mouth went dry. His head swam and his senses reeled. With a moan Ed Whittle sank to the floor like a collapsed balloon.

Major Smith drummed impatiently on the console top with his finger-tips. The hands of the chronometer were creeping round. Another fifty-seven minutes to go! The General should be back in his helicopter by now. Why didn't he send a radio message? Perhaps he wanted to observe radio silence because of the Aliens. The Major peered for the twentieth time through the caravan window to see if his Chief's 'copter was yet in sight. Nothing. He picked up the field telephone.

"Any sign of the Chief's machine?" he asked over the wire. He was speaking to the sergeant operating the mobile scanner.

"Not a sign, sir," the sergeant replied. "Plenty of other craft on the screen but no signal from a 'copter."

"Thank you, sergeant," the Major said. "Let me know the second you pick up a likely reflection."

He replaced the phone. He was getting more worried by the minute. The Mark IX was quite ready, and had been for some time. Its built-in guidance system had been set with the utmost possible care by the Major himself. No one else knew its precise target, the other officers believing it to be programmed to splash down harmlessly in the English Channel. No one else knew that this was no practice missile, but a deadly weapon of frightening power. No one else knew that in ninety-seven seconds after firing this terrifying projectile would "home" on to the escape shaft of the Underground Hall. A red switch by the Major's right hand was ready for the firing contact.

Where, in Heaven's name, was Ed? Though it wasn't warm in the caravan control room—at least none of the other men inside found it so—the Major was perspiring freely. He patted his left breast pocket for assurance. Inside was his order to launch the Mark IX at 18.00 hours precisely, irrespective of whether he had heard from the Commander-in-Chief or not. Ed had been quite specific. Even if he was still on the Island, trapped perhaps by the Aliens, the missile was to be launched. Major Smith pulled out a handkerchief and surreptitiously mopped his face. He didn't want any of the other officers to notice what a great strain he was under.

As General Whittle sank to the ground the astronauts gathered round him anxiously, and Sue knelt beside him. Alexander came forward.

"Have no fear," he said in his melodious voice. "The General will come to no harm. He has fallen asleep as you did, Sue. Your human minds can bear so much, but no more."

Then Michael spoke.

"We have probed the General's mind. He came here intent to destroy us. Alas, he is typical of so many in your World. Although you had a Pattern sent to you by the Supreme Intelligence you have not followed Him. Until you do so, we cannot come to dwell among you. So soon we must depart."

"That Pattern was Jesus?" asked Sue in a whisper.

"Yes," Michael answered simply, "and your World has not yet followed His example. But some day you will. Otherwise you will destroy yourselves, as have the people of other worlds before you."

"But what can we do? How can we help?" asked Tony in a small voice.

"Smother all hatred and greed in yourselves," Michael told his listeners, "and encourage love in others."

Something must have happened, the Major told himself. Twenty-nine minutes to go—and no sign of, or word from, his friend and Chief. Surely, surely he was off the Island by now. He would never have cut things this fine. He would know what a dilemma he was causing. It wasn't like Ed to place a friend, or even a subordinate, in this position. The Major took the single sheet of paper from his breast pocket, opened it carefully, and read it through twice. It was quite specific, and bore the Commander-in-Chief's signature. Whatever the circumstances, it said, the Mark IX was to be launched at 18.00 hours—in twenty-five minutes' time!

The General opened his eyes, but lay still for a few seconds, trying to collect his thoughts. He saw Sue and the astronauts bending over him. Beyond them he saw—the Visitors. Then memory came flooding back and he struggled to sit up.

"Quick," he gasped, "we must all get out. I must get to a phone."

He struggled to his feet, sweat pouring from his pallid face. The others looked at him in astonishment, but not the Visitors. The General glanced at his watch and looked round wildly. It was 17.50 hours—ten minutes before the time set for launching. If he could get to a phone there would be time, even now, to contact Harold Smith and cancel the whole operation. Then Michael spoke to the distraught Commander-in-Chief.

"General," he asked, "why are you so upset? Why must you get to a telephone?"

"Because I've made the greatest mistake any man can ever make," General Whittle burst out. "I've ordered you and most of this Island to be destroyed. The missile will be launched in —nine minutes. There is still time to stop it."

"No, General, there is not. You could not reach a telephone in that time. Your missile will be launched exactly as you ordered," Michael said sternly.

The Commander-in-Chief was a stricken man.

"Then God forgive me for what I have done," he mumbled. "Those thousands of people—and you!"

Major Smith read his Chief's order for the last time. It was now but thirty seconds from the firing time, and all the men in the control caravan were poised and ready. Some distance away the Mark IX glinted in the setting sun. All personnel had been withdrawn to a safe distance. Only the red switch had to be closed. Twenty seconds! An eternity. Ten seconds. The World stood still. Four, three, two, one, ZERO. With a silent prayer for his friend, Major Harold Smith launched the most deadly missile that had ever been made.

In the distance a glow appeared at the base of the Mark IX. Then passed a seemingly endless three seconds before the lethal cylinder began to move. Slowly at first, then with ever-increasing speed, the Mark IX climbed into the sky, its sides shining like liquid gold in the brilliant sunset. The men in the control caravan, and those manning the radar scanner, smiled at each other in pride. It had been a faultless launch. Their work was over. The Mark IX was beyond recall!

Sue looked at the General with pity. Although she understood the terrible words he had said, she felt no fear. Neither, apparently, did Chris, Morrey, Tony, or Serge. The strong and gentle faces of the three Visitors took away all their fears. Not so with General Whittle. The poor man had had a terrible shock. His sleek black hair, which had been his secret pride and joy, had turned white. He looked an old and shattered man.

"Do not fear, General," Peter said to the Commander-in-Chief. "No harm will come from your missile."

"But—you don't understand," Whittle gasped, looking round wildly. "It's aimed for this Hall, and it's got the deadliest load ever launched."

"We do understand," Peter replied with a ghost of a smile. "But will you trust us and fear not?"

Edward Whittle raised his eyes to the three wonderful faces that were looking down at him, and a miraculous thing happened. The indescribable turmoil in his mind, the deadly fear in his heart, all vanished. In their place came a calm and peace that he'd never felt before. The lines on his forehead were smoothed away. His eyes brightened. Suddenly he seemed a calmer, younger man. Only the pure-white hair bore evidence of his ordeal.

At Chaldon Down there was consternation. The radar scanner recording the flight of the Mark IX had suddenly lost its objective. Other reflections from aircraft were still recorded, so the apparatus was working correctly. But the Mark IX echo had vanished as if it had never been. Even if the projectile had exploded in flight the debris would have been recorded as it fell to Earth. But now there was—nothing! Major Smith couldn't believe it! What incredible thing had happened to his beloved missile?

"Your Mark IX no longer exists in this dimension," Peter told Edward Whittle. "It has been moved to another."

"So it—it will not land here? It will not destroy this Island?" gasped the General.

"No, it will not land anywhere," Alexander smiled. "It is in another dimension where it will do no harm. It is as if it never existed."

"Thank God for that," the Commander-in-Chief breathed earnestly. His eyes were closed. Perhaps he was indeed praying.

"And now," Michael said, "we shall shortly be leaving you. Our mission here has ended for the moment."

"Leaving us?" Tony said in dismay. "How do you mean? Your mission has ended?"

"Yes, we are leaving," Michael repeated. "Our mission was to observe what progress Human Beings have made along the path that all Life must take."

"And we haven't made any progress?" asked Chris.

"Very little, I'm afraid," Michael replied sadly. "Your

World is very little better than it was two thousand years ago in spite of the example and help you received."

"But will you be coming again?" asked Morrey.

"We or some other Visitors will come to you from time to time. The Supreme Intelligence is watching over you constantly. What you call U.F.O.s will be seen increasingly in your skies," Michael told his listeners. "Now it is time for us to say goodbye."

"But shall we never see you again?" Sue burst out in obvious distress.

"We will come to you in your dreams," smiled Michael. "If ever you want us—that is how we shall come. Goodbye, friends. Goodbye, General. You must now go your ways as we shall go ours. We know you will never forget us."

The three Visitors looked at the humans with sadness. How they would have loved to report back that Mankind was now ready for closer contact with Extra-terrestrial Intelligences. Perhaps this short visit would help a little, through the few people they had met. Perhaps these six Humans would spread knowledge of the emissaries from the Supreme Intelligence, and prepare the way for more.

Chris turned to his companions.

"Let's go," he said simply. His heart was too full to say more.

Silently, but with backward glances at the Visitors, the Humans turned and followed Chris towards the exit tunnel. As they did so, the blue light seemed to get stronger. They no longer felt sad, but quite elated. Then they heard it: the Visitors were singing a farewell song.

Sue had heard many records of famous choirs. She had listened to the World's most famous singers. She had visited festivals in cathedrals and chapels. But never had she heard anything like this. "Angel Voices" was the phrase that came into her mind. There was no other way to describe them. The great Hall, with its glazed walls, was a perfect setting for such wonderful music, and the six humans stood entranced as they listened to the voices of Michael, Peter, and Alexander. The words came through the tunnel with the utmost clarity.

"All glory be to you Most High, Most Holy and Most
Blest,
Who from Your realms beyond the shield of light
Hold all the swirling globes
As a moment's thought within Your eternal mind.
Teach Your children of this World
To take the path you have chosen for them,
To follow the example you have given them,
To love one another as you love them,
That they may build a sure foundation
Whereon to grow in You;
That the tiny glimmer of their faith
May burst into glorious light;
That the day, so long delayed,
May surely dawn
When they have in You
The faith You have in them,
And Your wondrous work will be done."

Not until the voices were stilled and the last echoes had died away was the little party able to press on—so moved had they been by the Visitors' farewell. At last they resumed their walk into the main tunnel, where the mundane electric lights glowed brilliantly. Edward Whittle looked at his watch. It was 18.20 hours, some eighteen minutes after the Mark IX should have done its deadly work. But a miracle had happened in several senses, and he was grateful that it had.

"May I go and see the Bailiff?" he asked suddenly as they neared the entrance. "I have been very discourteous to him."

"I think that can be arranged," Chris answered, a load taken off his mind. He knew how upset Sir Arnold had been at the brusque treatment of the Commander-in-Chief. It seemed that the General wished to make amends.

At the Royal Court House Edward Whittle was full of apologies to the Bailiff. Then he asked if he might use a telephone so that he could talk to Major Smith. While he was in another room doing this, Chris told the Bailiff all that had happened. Sir Arnold's face paled at the knowledge of how near to destruction his beloved Island had been. Those wonderful Visitors had saved it, and now General Whittle was a changed man.

"The Mark IX vanished completely from the radar screen," he told the others when he returned after his call. "I have told Major Smith that I will tell him what happened when I see him tomorrow. Now, Sir Arnold, if you have forgiven me for my rudeness, may I avail myself of your hospitality?"

The sherry glasses appeared like magic!

"Look after yourself, my dear," the General said to Sue as he patted her hand. To the astronauts he gave his smartest salute. Then he strode across the tarmac to his waiting helicopter. Before entering he turned and waved. The four young men and the girl waved back.

"What do we do now?" asked Tony as they drank coffee back at Le Saumarez. Peter and Carla had joined them, and Chris told them all that had happened, with the exception of how near the Island had been to destruction.

"We'll have to report back to Sir Billy," Chris sighed, "and Sue will have to go back to her job."

The girl was utterly dismayed. How could she go back to being a secretary, even to a distinguished surgeon such as Sir Anthony Blackham?

"I suppose so," she said unhappily, "but it will be very hard after these adventures. You don't suppose—"

"We'll see, Sue. We'll see if Sir Billy can think up something that we can all do together," Chris smiled, and all the other astronauts brightened up at this possibility. The five young people looked at each other with affection. Had they not shared a unique experience, the outcome of which none could know?

Of one thing they were sure. Neither they, nor the World, would ever be the same again.